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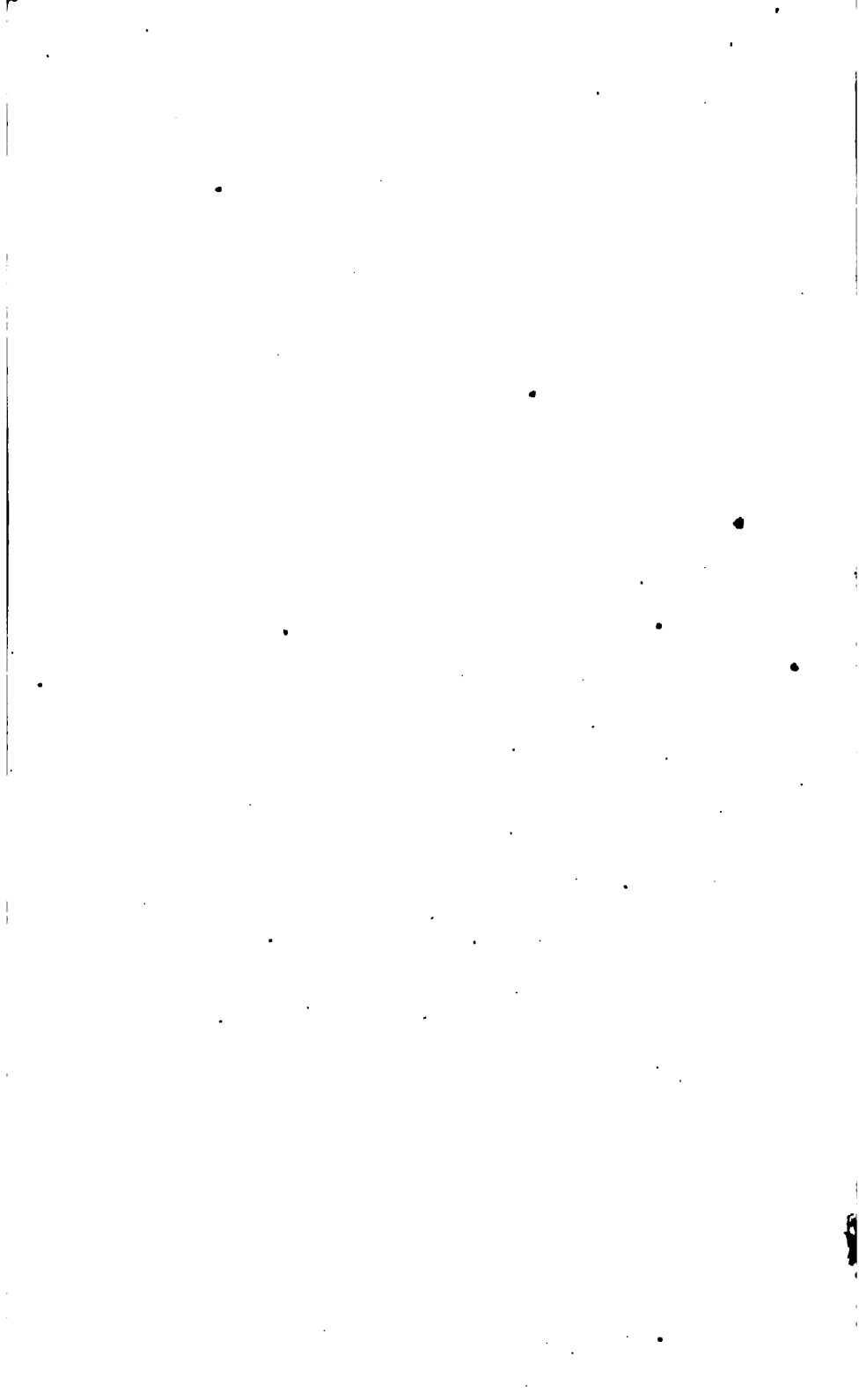
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A Monthly Magazine

OF

LIGHT AND AMUSING LITERATURE

FOR

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CONTENTS OF VOL. LXVIII.

	PAGE
A Fair Hindoo. By JOHN H. WILLMER. Chapters XXI. to XXXII. (<i>Conclusion.</i>)	96, 208, 321, 430
Alfreda. By MRS. LODGE. Chapters XXIII. to XLIV. (<i>Conclusion.</i>)	1, 113, 225, 337, 449, 561
An Afternoon's Folly	54
An Incident of the Cholera in Spain. By F. B. FORESTER	500
An Unaccountable Verdict. By WILLMOTT DIXON	641
A Walk Round Corunna, North Spain. By LOUISA M. RAWSON- WALKER	201
Charles Reade. By ELSIE RHODES	590
Clare	371
English Beer in the Olden Time. By W. B. PALEY	171
In an Italian Garden. By "SPAIN"	264
Just Waiting. By HANNAH MARTIN	485
Lady Milchester's Diamonds. By RICHARD WARFIELD	282
Lourdes. By FRANCES DEW	23
Mademoiselle Margallo. By HASTINGS BERKELEY	149
Marie Mancini. A Biographical Sketch. By ROSA NIEDERHAUSER	531
Mr. Alington's Retirement.. By E. C. HAMLEY	301

	PAGE
Mrs. Savill's Quest. By E. S. CURRY	83
No Just Cause or Impediment. By HELEN F. HETHERINGTON	621
Old-Fashioned Railway Travelling. By W. B. PALEY	359
On the Voyage Home. By T. W.	182
Our Irish Fortnight. By ETHEL F. HEDDLE	422
Reminiscences of a Visit to India and China. By L. A. L.	
Parts II. to IV. (<i>Conclusion.</i>)	133, 247, 467
That Brooch Business. By E. N. LEIGH FRY	515
The Abbot's Secret. By A. OMAN	603
The Curse of Mahendra. By RUSSELL SIDNEY	67
The Dramatic Season, 1894-5. By GUY T. LITTLE	311
The Old Order Changeth. By GORDON ROY	36
This Transitory Life. By THOROLD DICKSON and M. PECHELL.	
Chapters I. to XVIII. (<i>Conclusion.</i>)	391, 541, 652
Whom the Queen Delighteth to Honour—Sir Henry Irving,	
July, 1895. By EMILIA AYLMER GOWING	310

LONDON SOCIETY

JULY, 1895.

Alfreda.

By MRS. LODGE,
Author of "GEORGE ELVASTON," etc.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"The stately homes of England,
How beautiful they stand !
Amidst their tall ancestral trees,
O'er all this pleasant land."

ALEX CAMERON'S thoughts kept running on these beautifully descriptive lines by Hemans, as he walked through Chillingwood Park on his way to the mansion.

The broad demesne with its lovely glades and gently swelling uplands, its silvery lake and bosky dells, with the fallow deer browsing boldly in the sunshine.

The air was soft and balmy, one of those delightful days that sometimes visit us in the early springtime, more beautiful in its freshness than the sultry summer hours with all their wealth of flowers and foliage.

The forest trees were bare as yet, but their leafless branches brought out the dark pine trees in bold relief, and the clumps of evergreens appeared all the greener and fresher by contrast.

By the margin of the lake immense clumps of rhododendrons were covered with bloom ; to the eye it seemed one mass of varied colour, exquisitely shaded in, from the purest white to the deepest purple.

The sun, too, glinted through the trees on copse and hedgerow, tufted all over with the bluebell and primrose, the pale anemone and golden daffodil, and in sunny sheltered nooks wood violets and the lily of the valley scented the air with their delicate fragrance.

The birds made music in the groves, the rooks cawed merrily in the old elms, and ever and anon the golden pheasant would dart across the green sward, its bright glowing plumage looking gem-bedecked in the sunshine.

Squirrels glided nimbly about in all directions, apparently in search of stray nuts to eke out their winter store ; and then anon a timid hare peeped forth from his covert, only to dart back again at the sound of approaching footsteps.

Something to wonder at and admire met the eye at every turn ; such giant gnarled oaks, such wide-spreading beeches and grand Spanish chestnuts were seldom met with elsewhere in such profusion and size.

Everything in and around the wide domain was kept in the most perfect order ; no broken branches lay neglected on the grassy glades ; no straggling undergrowth choked up the groves of evergreens, nor could a weed be seen along the smooth broad avenue that led direct to the house.

Order and quietude reigned on every side ; it seemed impossible for jarring strife to dwell amidst that sweet arcadian scene of peacefulness.

The mansion stood on an eminence, and could be seen to advantage from the extensive park that surrounded it on all sides.

It was of a simple, almost severe, style of architecture, of the Ionic order, and appeared rather graceful and majestic than magnificent ; solid and without undue ornament, it stood out in bold relief against the distant uplands, a stately imposing object amid the most varied and charming scenery in England.

As Alex Cameron reached the broad flight of marble steps leading to the principal entrance he paused. His heart misgave him.

It seemed nothing short of sacrilege for him to intrude into that stately home with his dark tale of dishonour, and yet the blow must fall sooner or later. Was it not better that its proud unbending owner should be prepared to meet it.

Ah, well, he could not turn back, though he hated the task before him full sorely, and would have given ten years of his life to be able to wipe it clean out of his memory for aye.

The dignified middle-aged servant who opened the door looked most imposing in tags and black velvet breeches, black

silk hose and silver shoe-buckles, his hair well powdered, and more than a suspicion of rouge on his puffy cheeks.

He welcomed Alex with a gracious smile and the profoundest of bows, and as a mark of high consideration, showed him into the library without the assistance of two tall footmen who were standing attention in the hall.

"Yes, her ladyship was at home," he replied with due solemnity, as though he were announcing an affair of the gravest importance; "but she did not receive any but her most intimate friends as yet."

Then in answer to Alex he went on to say that her ladyship and Lady Maud had been quite low and out of health since his lordship's death; and indeed, the entire household was low and out of sorts—he himself more especially.

"And to think that I remember you and his lordship boys together," he said, with genuine tears in his eyes; "and many is the time you came down to the butler's pantry, when I was first footman, and ate yer bread-an'-cheese with, saving yer honor's dignity, the appetite of farmers' sons; and his lordship with no more pride about him than an angel—ah, he was the real sort, he was—an' now he's gone; we shall never see his like in Chillingwood again. The ladies, you see, sir, of the family are all high; they never seems to be like common sort of mortals, they are so dainty, and so delicate, and so much above every one else, that even we domestics don't have no sort of feeling in common with them. I wouldn't dare shed a tear in her ladyship's presence if my heart-strings were breaking through grief of the loss we've had; and, as Mrs. Topper says to me often, 'It does break my heart, it does, to see her ladyship bowed down with sorrow, and I never dare offer one word nor look of sympathy,' says she. Lady Maud, too, is getting the high tone of the family. Her ladyship even passes me by in the hall as though I were one of the stone figures in the niches of the hall, or a common person unfit for notice. An' yet I remember her ladyship from a wee child, when she flew about like a bird, with a kind word and smile for us all. Ah, sir, to think how we are all changed, it makes me low, it does."

The dignified servitor here wiped his eyes with a common red cotton pocket-handkerchief, and looked considerably less imposing in the act than one would have imagined possible. But

then he was only human after all, and a red cotton pocket-handkerchief applied to nose and eyes instead of a cambric would make even a Beau Brummel look common.

But he soon recovered himself, and left the room to inform her ladyship of Alex's arrival.

The young barrister was still pondering over what had just been said about Lady Maud's altered demeanour, when plush returned to say that her ladyship begged the honour of Mr. Cameron's presence in the blue drawing-room.

After traversing one or two corridors and an ante-chamber plush opened a door noiselessly, and in a subdued tone announced the visitor to her ladyship.

The countess was seated at the far end of the apartment, near the fire ; a dim, religious light pervaded, and a sweet, though almost imperceptible perfume floated on the warm air. The scene that met the eye of Alex as he entered was so full of calm refined repose, that the same feeling returned on his senses once more.

It was nothing less than sacrilege. How dare he profane so stately a sanctuary with that immitigable tale of wrong he had come to reveal ?

The thought of that gaunt relentless woman invading such quiet state with the wild story of her wrongs made him shudder ; it was not in the fitness of things that this should be allowed to come to pass.

The room was far more fitted for stately courtesy than familiar converse. Yet nothing was wanting to give it that home-like look of comfort that is so eminently English.

A grand piano stood invitingly open ; new music strewed over the top, and music, both old and new, piled on floor and canterbury convenient to hand.

Books and papers were scattered about in a sort of admirable disorder, on tables—and indeed anywhere, either on table, chair or ottoman, wherever the readers last laid them down.

It was a spacious and lofty apartment, with three tall windows ; the centre window, being wider than the others and reaching down to the floor, opened on to a flight of steps leading into the private grounds of the south front. This centre window was wide open when Alex entered the room, and he could see, from where he stood, the broad sweep of velvety turf and the flower beds, gay with hyacinths, tulips and twenty other bright spring flowers.

The furniture of the apartment was both chaste and costly, the upholstery truly luxurious ; the easy-chairs and sofas, covered in the richest satin, seemed stuffed with eider-down, so yielding were they to the slightest pressure.

Priceless china vases, choice ornaments, gems of *bric-à-brac*, and the thousand and one charming trifles with which the wealthy are able to surround themselves, met the eye on every side.

The walls were adorned with charming landscapes by Van Ostade, Poussin and Wouvermans.

The windows were draped with the richest Genoa velvet of pale-blue lined with dead-gold coloured satin.

The carpet, of Persian design, was so blended that no particular shade or colour arrested the eye, and was so thick that it yielded to the tread like the springy turf on some well-kept lawn, and deadened the sound of the heaviest footfall.

Alex remembered the room well ; he had often sat there in happier days, sipping weak afternoon tea, with his youthful companions, after a game of tennis or some other out-door game in the spacious grounds beyond ; yet, somehow, the stately repose and almost regal air of the apartments had never struck him so forcibly as now.

The countess looked up from a book she was apparently engaged in reading as he entered, and held out her hand to welcome him with a cold, courteous smile.

"Excuse me, Alex," she said, in her regal gracious way. "I am too much of an invalid to rise up to receive you."

Alex expressed his sympathy more by look than words at this simple announcement of a too apparent fact.

The countess was sadly changed and aged since last they met.

Her cheeks were pale, her eyes sunken, and silver threads mingled with her dark hair that a few months since retained all the luxuriance and silken gloss of youth.

After a few common-place remarks, an awkward pause ensued.

Alex began to feel as though cold water trickled down his back and chilled him to the marrow ; he shivered visibly before the glowing fire.

"You wished to see me on some particular business, you said in your note, did you not?" inquired the countess. "In what way can I serve you?"

"It was not on any business of my own that I sought an interview, but on a rather unpleasant subject concerning ——"

Here he hesitated, turning very red in the face, and feeling in some unexplained way as though the unpleasantness were of his own creating.

"Ah!" ejaculated the countess inquiringly, looking him full in the face, with a rather haughty stare of incredulity.

The stare restored Alex to himself; he drew himself up and bore her prolonged stare with a look in his dark eyes that betokened pity rather than defiance.

The countess felt that the man before her had not come to sue her favour. What then was his errand? She withdrew her gaze with a well-assumed air of indifference, and awaited his communication with her usual well-bred ease of manner.

"I repeat," he said in a much firmer tone, and with far more self-possession than he had felt before since he entered the room, "that my errand here is a most unpleasant one, and very nearly concerns your son's widow ——"

"In that case, you should have seen Lady Chineron herself," interrupted the countess coldly, as she leant back in her chair with an air of weariness.

Alex's temper began to rise at this cavalier treatment. He was half inclined to take the letter from his pocket-book that contained her son's confession and hand it to her without further preface.

"I do not like to pain you with reference to the sad bereavement you have sustained, but the painful communication I am obliged to make to you concerns your late son's honour, and I think it should be told in your ear first," he said in a cold even tone, and with a gaze as steady as her own fixed full on her.

"Ah," she merely ejaculated, but with a faint flush rising to her brow and a show of interest in her attitude.

"Perhaps you had better read this letter; it is the last your son wrote, and in it he bequeathed me a fearful legacy of ——"

"Give it me!" she cried, stretching forth her hand with sudden energy. "Why have you kept it back till now?"

Alex had taken the letter by this time out of his pocket-book. He handed it to her without saying another word.

Not wishing to note the effect this dire epistle would cause her

at first sight, he rose up and went to the open window, intending to take a turn in the grounds for a few minutes.

But ere he took the first step outside, the sound of a hollow moan arrested his attention. He at once returned to the drawing-room, to find the countess apparently in a dead swoon.

His first impulse was to rush to the bell and summon assistance.

Overcome as she was, her presence of mind had not forsaken her; she was deadly pale, but not senseless. As he reached the bell-pull, she faintly ejaculated:

"No, no; it is only a passing spasm."

He drew back his hand, but after a minute or more, observing that the colour did not return to her lips, and that her eyes were half-closed in a death-like sort of stare, he became alarmed, and taking up a small china bowl from a console near at hand, he dashed through the open window, flew down the steps and across the lawn, towards a spring which he well knew bubbled up cool and clear even on the sultriest summer day.

A little water might revive her, he thought. He could well discern that the countess did not like any of her domestics to witness her sudden prostration.

He was back again at her side with a bowl full of clear pure water ere it takes the time to tell his errand, but in that short time the fatal letter had disappeared from between her long taper fingers.

As she reached out her shapely hand to take the bowl from him, he could not help noting that it looked thin, almost transparent, and yet what power of will lay in it. A hand of the softest and whitest—a hand of satin, with a grip of iron.

She took a long draught of the cool bright water, then dipped her pocket-handkerchief in the bowl and bathed her brow.

"Yes, I am better now, thanks," she said faintly and with a long-drawn sigh. "Sit down, pray, and don't look so scared at me."

This in answer to his anxious inquiry as to how she felt, but she made no allusion to the cause of her sudden indisposition.

For some minutes she gazed into the fire with quivering lip and anxious brow. She was evidently gathering herself up for a supreme effort.

"Will you please give me the certificate," she said, abruptly breaking a long and painful silence. She held out her hand

towards him as she spoke, but did not remove her eyes from their fixed gaze on the glowing embers.

Alex felt greatly relieved to know that he could not comply with her request, the coveted paper being safe at his chambers in the Temple. He told her so in a few words.

Before he had finished speaking she withdrew her eyes from the fire and fixed them full on his face.

He returned her gaze with the same fixed purpose. There was no need of words. She perfectly understood that he did not intend to intrust the certificate in her hands.

"Have you seen this woman?" she asked with suppressed passion.

He simply answered in the affirmative. He felt aggrieved at being treated as an enemy.

"And the child?"

"Yes."

"And you have taken up their cause. For the sake of that accursed woman, will you bring down disgrace on two of the noblest houses in the land?"

"Heaven forbid!" he ejaculated. "Pray spare me this injustice. I am no willing agent in this most deplorable matter."

"And you will help us? You will crush this wretched woman at the outset? What is this creature to you that you should serve her interests and ruin your oldest friends?"

Alex made no answer. He had decided to remain neutral, at least for the present; but to crush her son's widow—ah! well, that was quite another sort of affair.

"You do not answer me," she went on, beads of damp sweat standing on her deadly-pale brow. "Tell me the worst. Does this woman know what—what we know? Have you shown her this fearful letter?"

"Did I not tell you that I considered it my duty to consult you before taking any steps in this painful business?"

"Ah, yes—pardon me. Say you will stand on our side, Alex. Surely you will do this for—for the sake of—of Maud and the old times."

"I would rather not call the old times to remembrance just at present," he replied, with a shade of bitterness in his tone. "And now that I have made you acquainted with this painful business I will leave."

"Stay a moment," she cried with nervous impatience. "Remember how much we need a strong arm to ward off the coming blow. If you were one of us—if family ties bound you to us would you not feel called on to defend the family honour against the attacks of this woman?"

"It would be possible to put off the evil day; but consider this woman has right on her side, and now that she knows the truth, it is not likely that she will let the matter rest where it is. I think you should be prepared to meet her claim without hostility, and some show of fairness; she might then be persuaded to settle the matter amicably for the sake of her child and——"

"Stay, sir!" cried the countess, with a stern, set face. "Let that woman do her worst; I will make no compromise. With my consent she shall never bear the name of Chineron?"

"Well, all things considered, it would be as well that the person claiming to be the late Lord Chineron's widow should take the first steps to make her claim good. It is impossible to refute her right to bear the name, however, and the child of the marriage is heiress to the estate."

The countess regarded him with an angry stare.

"You state hard facts, sir, with the cool air of a judge on the bench. It is in your power to wound us, and doubtless you will not spare."

Alex rose to go. He had performed a most unpleasant task as gently as he could. He perfectly understood her carefully-worded offer of a bribe to crush her son's widow, and she must have been well aware of his love for her daughter to think for a moment that for the sake of obtaining her hand he would enter into what was nothing short of a conspiracy to crush her son's widow and child.

He began to regret that he had not given up the marriage certificate to the rightful owner; her husband had never knowingly repudiated her. Why should he aid this proud unrelenting woman to heap wrong on wrong?

The countess detained him as he was about to quit her presence with yet another question, asked in such a quiet, sorrowful tone that, spite of himself, his heart relented towards her instantly.

"You have seen this woman, Alex. Where does she live, and by what name does she call herself?"

Alex confessed that he did not know, and then in a few words

he related in what manner he had made the acquaintance of both mother and child.

"And the child was called Freda—Freda Trimby when you first saw her?" she asked with knitted brows and a far-away look.

To this Alex replied in the affirmative, adding that Mrs. Trimby had formerly been a servant to Mrs. Mathers, and that Alice had gone direct to her after her mother's death.

"And the child is still with that Mrs. Trimby, you say? Well, better give me her address; the child at least has some claim on the family; she shall be my care, and I have your promise, have I not, that you will not stir in this painful business, but let matters take their course without your assistance? The—the—ah! the certificate of marriage is in your keeping, safe at your chambers, is not it? Well, I shall want to look at it some day; that will decide me as to how I shall act towards—ah, towards this child you call Freda; one should not be hasty in such a matter as this. You will surely allow that, Alex?"

To this he replied with the utmost sincerity, that so many interests were concerned in the unpleasant business that he should be heartily glad to shift the responsibility from his shoulders to that of some other person; that had it not been for Bertha, Lady Chineron and her little son, he should have advised a certain person to seek out a solicitor of standing and employ him to investigate her claims.

"But you will do nothing of the sort at present, will you, Alex?" she said quickly, catching her breath, either with nervousness or suppressed passion. "Better stay and dine with us; we have not fully discussed this painful affair yet, and who knows but that your legal astuteness may not help us out of the threatened storm."

She uttered the last words in her most courteous manner, with a sort of touching dependence on his power to aid her, that might have won over a less practised man of the world to her side.

But his feelings had undergone a rapid change with regard to her within the last half-hour, and if he could not help feeling pity for her coming misfortune, he at least no longer regarded her with respectful reverence.

Yet although he declined her proffered hospitality they parted with perfect urbanity.

The countess had recovered her self-possession, and assumed her society mask once more.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ON after reflection Alex Cameron felt rather mortified with the result of his interview with the Dowager Lady Chineron.

She had treated him as her enemy, simply because he refused to aid her in crushing the widow of her son. True he deplored the fact, but then as he had been enjoined, as it were, by his late friend's last breath to see this woman and her child restored to their rightful position, he was bound by every tie of honour to carry out his friend's wishes.

His conscience began to trouble him sorely, on account of the manner in which he had met the appeal of the poor friendless and much-wronged woman.

It was in vain that he endeavoured to persuade himself that he had done it from the best motives, that what he had done was to put off the evil day, and essay to shield the blow from that other woman who was as deeply wronged as herself.

Oh, it was pitiful! He shrank even now from sending such a firebrand into the midst of the supposed widow's household, and tearing the crown of legal right from Bertha's head, thereby dis-inheriting her son.

But what was he to do? He dared no longer keep back the marriage certificate intrusted to his care. For a man of his calm reasoning powers he was strangely confused and vacillating.

The matter would have appeared plain enough to most men. But Alex Cameron's sympathies were all enlisted on the side of the high-born women, on whom this terrible woman had the power to bring down such dire disgrace and misery.

Never was a man more surely fixed on the horns of a dilemma than was Alex Cameron at that time.

He felt an inherent dislike to the woman, and would rather take a journey of a thousand miles, or face a tiger in the jungle, than willingly face another interview with her.

Although he knew that Freda's mother had the right to be addressed as Lady Chineron, he could only bring himself to call her *that woman*. She was in his eyes a sort of maleficent fate, a fury rather to be kept at bay and shunned than sought after and propitiated.

Still, he considered it a pity that the dowager did not put aside her enmity and meet "*this woman*" in a conciliating spirit, if only to avoid open scandal.

He would have inclosed the pocket-book in an envelope, without any explanation on his part, and have sent it to "*that woman*" only that he did not know by what name to address her, nor her place of abode.

A man, even of honourable and independent spirit, finds himself driven to mean shifts when once he departs from the strict rule of integrity.

Had Alex possessed the moral courage to have gone boldly to this poor friendless widow, and have given the pocket-book into her hands then and there, he could have set his mind at rest and eased his conscience of a grievous burden. He was merely an instrument of justice, deputed by another to right a great wrong. It was not his fault that misery and utter ruin would fall on more than one innocent head when that wrong found redress.

Well, on one thing he had decided. He would not stop in England; he would take care to be far removed from the scene when the crash came.

It was a cowardly resolve on his part, no doubt, but, as we have said before, he had not the moral courage to face the result of delivering the marriage certificate into the hands of the rightful owner.

The next day, after his memorable interview with the Dowager Lady Chineron, he decided to visit his chambers and ask Mrs. Trimble for "*that woman's*" address. He might possibly chance to meet her, then circumstances should decide him how to act.

Arrived at his chambers, another difficulty stared him in the face. Did Mrs. Trimble still persist in calling Freda her daughter? and what name did her real mother pass under?

His only course was to summon Mrs. Trimble to his presence, ostensibly for the purpose of inquiring after the health of Freda.

But when the housekeeper at length appeared, she was no longer the Mrs. Trimble of old. She was thin and care-worn, even crushed-looking.

In answer to Alex Cameron's inquiry after Freda, she burst into tears, and it was some time before she succeeded in conquering her emotion and ceased to dry her copious tears with her apron.

"Ah, sir, she's gone!" she sobbed forth, wringing her hands.

"Gone—is she dead?" asked Alex, with a pang of self-reproach at his long neglect of the innocent child.

"She's all the same as dead to me, sir," went on the weeping woman. "Her mother took her away last evening when I was out on an errand; an' she was that ungrateful that she never left sign nor token behind as to where she had gone to—after all I've done for her, too, let alone keeping Freda as though she were my own flesh an' blood for years—not to speak of the mischief she's made atween me an' Trimble, as never had an angry word or thought till she made strife atween us."

Alex sat down, overcome with astonishment; this new feature of the case threw him quite off his guard.

"You always told me Freda was your own child," he said rather severely, the legal spirit of cross-examination taking possession of his mind.

"Well, an' no great sin either, I take it, to adopt a poor forsaken little mite, an' behave like a mother to her ever since she was born; though I'm suffering badly enough for it now. I'm sure I was as fond of that child an' treated her kinder than if she was my very own"

"Who, then, are her parents? I'm deeply interested in all that concerns Freda. Pray sit down and oblige me by relating her history."

"Ah, well, sir," replied Mrs. Trimble, gladly accepting the offer of a seat and a listener at one and the same time, "there's not much of a history belonging to the poor little darling; but if you wish to hear, I've no objection to tell you how it all came about that I took to calling Freda my own child an' deceived Trimble, who has been the best of husbands to me from the hour he married me till he found out I'd been deceiving him all along about Freda."

Here Mrs. Trimble broke down again and had recourse to her apron once more. She was able to proceed, however, with her narrative. Indeed, the good woman was rather glad to have the opportunity of setting herself right with Alex in regard to Freda.

"Well, sir," she began, with the corner of her apron held ready for active service, in case the tears should well forth once more, 'well, sir, it's nigh seven years ago that Freda's mother came to me in her trouble. She told me that young Lord Chineron had

gone through the marriage ceremony with her at a register office, but as she couldn't tell where that office was, an' hadn't any certificate to show for it, why, of course, I concluded there was nothing binding about it, an' that the young lord had only been fooling her; an' it wasn't long before she was obliged to come to that conclusion herself.

"She hadn't a friend in the world but me, an' I only a very humble one, seeing I'd only been servant to her parents before I married Trimby; but her mother had been a kind, good mistress to me, an' Miss Mathers was but a child when first I went to live at the Rectory; an' I was always fond of her, an' would have done anything in life to serve her.

"Well, sir, as I was saying, she came to me in her trouble; an' when the baby was two days old, mine as was just six weeks older died. Trimby was away, an' wasn't expected home for some months. He had set his heart on that infant of mine, who was only ten days old when he left home, but then he'd been always longing for to have a daughter. He didn't care half so much for the boys as he did for that mite of a girl. Perhaps I loved that infant, too, better than all the rest; an' when she was taken from me, my heart in its sorrow went out to the child of Alice Mathers. Trimby would never know that it was her child that had taken the place of his own at my breast, so I adopted the infant, an' Trimby never suspected that Freda was not his very own.

"We brought her up, an' was as tender over her as though she were the flower of the flock. Trimby doted on her. But, alas! it would break a heart of stone to see his face when it first dawned on his mind that he had been deceived by his own wife, an' that he'd been wasting his heart's best affections on the child of a stranger.

"First, when the young lord came up to our room on that fatal night, Trimby didn't seem to heed his presence, but Alice was that wild with passion that she soon laid hold of his attention when she began accusing the young nobleman of deserting his own flesh and blood to die of want in a garret. Trimby seemed dazed at first, but when the gentleman dropped on his knees by the bedside of the sick child an' sobbed like a woman, my husband turned round an' gave me a look that I'll never forget to my dying day.

"Ah, sir, that was a fearful night of suspense an' terror.

"Miss Mathers left the room with Lord Chineron ; I heard them go down stairs an' into your chambers together.

"It was some time past ten at night before she returned ; she looked white an' wild an' never once opened her lips to me.

"She sat down by the side of Freda, with a look in her face I'd never seen there before—a sort of revengeful triumph that made her eyes blaze like live coals, whilst her face was white as that of the dead.

"Ah, sir," went on Mrs. Trimble, bending forward and sinking her voice to a whisper, "Trimble has his doubts about the way that young lord came by his end—an', well, sir, so have I. When the policeman came up to our place that night, I little thought a murder had been committed beneath that very roof. Would you believe it, sir, I gave it to the officer pretty smart because I thought he'd found the front door open an' had made it his business to come up an' rate us about our carelessness.

"Well, I'm glad I didn't know the real facts, but still that policeman will have it that it wasn't suicide, an' he's said that same to Trimble more than once since the inquest."

"Oh, you can set your mind at rest about that," said Alex quickly ; "the fact that Lord Chineron committed suicide was proved beyond doubt."

"Well, sir, I'm glad to hear you say so. The young lord wronged Freda's mother cruelly, an' if in her passion she did revenge her cruel desertion, I'd rather bite my tongue off than say a word to bring his death home to her door, although, that she was in some way connected in bringing it about, I'm morally certain. However, she has suffered enough to turn any woman's heart to stone, an' I've heard her wish many's-the-time—an'-oft that she could be revenged on Lord Chineron an' his family. An' well she might, but then she should have had some thought for me, who was a friend to her through it all."

"But, why did she take Freda away without your knowledge, and, above all, why did she go away without leaving her address?" asked Alex, getting rather tired of Mrs. Trimble's prolix narration.

"Well, sir, I can't say she hadn't cause to be hurt an' offended—Trimble, as used to be the most good-natured an' patient creature under the sun, is a changed man. He's changed towards

his children, he's even changed to the wife of his bosom—he no longer trusts me, though he never said one word to me of passion or reproach, but the way he looks at me goes well-nigh to break my heart. When he thinks he's alone, an' of nights when he thinks I'm asleep, I hear him muttering to himself, an' he says over an' over again, 'I trusted her like an angel of light, yet she deceived me like the serpent in the Garden of Eden.' He's a great reader, sir, is my poor Trimbley, an' now he does nothing from morning till night but read Milton's 'Paradise Lost.'

"Fond as he used to be of Freda, he never cared to look at her after that fearful night, an' he's never mentioned her name since.

"He couldn't endure the sight of her mother either, an' whenever she entered the room where he was, he turned from her with a dark frown that made me tremble.

"Miss Mathers noticed this too, an' said she would take away Freda as soon as ever she was strong enough to be moved; but I didn't expect her to go away without a minute's warning, as she did at the last.

"As I told you, sir, I went out on an errand, an' when I came back she was gone, an' there was such a look on Trimbley's face that I daren't ask him any questions.

"The boys were a-bed, but next morning, when their father wasn't by, I asked them if they heard any words pass between Miss Mathers an' Trimbley; then they up an' told me that they heard high words which woke 'em up out of their sleep, an' as the bedroom door was half-open they sat up in bed an' listened. Miss Mathers was standing up, looking flushed an' angry with Freda in her arms, but all Gavy heard her say was, 'I tell you, David Trimbley, that man was my husband; I'll never darken your doors again till that's proved in the light of day—when it is proved, this despised child will be Lady Alfreda Chineron; I'm thinking you'll be proud enough of our acquaintance then!'

"With that, she went out and banged the door behind her. From that hour we have quite lost sight of her an' my poor darling, Freda."

"Alfreda," repeated Alex, "that's rather an uncommon name, is it not? Pray, do you know if the child was baptized in that name?"

"Oh, dear me, yes, sir; her mother had her baptized in St. Martin's Church. I was godmother myself to the poor little

infant ; you may see the entry any day for yourself, she's entered as the child of that poor young lord and Alice Chineron, his wife. You see, sir, she was named after my lost darling—Trimbley he gave her that name afore he went away ; his mother, who was a west-country woman, was called Janifer an' his sister was called Alfreda, so he let me choose between 'em, an' as Janifer was such an ugly name to my thinking we agreed to call her Alfreda, so for short her pet name was Freda. An' a pet she was with us all, heaven knows ; an' to think she is gone an' I may never set eyes on her again."

Alex drew in his breath ; his heart smote him—by what right had he kept this child out of her inheritance for a single day, after the fact of her birthright became known to him ?

However, he at once informed Mrs. Trimbley that it was of the utmost importance that Freda and her mother should be sought after without delay, and begged her to use every effort in her power to trace them out.

He did not take the housekeeper into his confidence, but he gave her to understand that Freda and her mother were entitled to property that would remove them far above want for the remainder of their existence.

The search, however, after Alice and her child proved unavailing.

Mrs. Trimbley made the most diligent inquiries in every direction, without gaining the least tidings of either.

I am not certain that Alex Cameron was much disappointed at this failure to trace the missing ones. It gave him time to mature his plans. He wanted to be out of England when this drama in real life became enacted before the public gaze.

CHAPTER XXV.

BARON MANNHEIM'S active brain was ever on the alert to make capital out of every adventitious circumstance.

Gold had been found in immense quantities—so the agents of the Universal Colonization Company reported home—on the territory annexed in the company's name, and competent men alone were wanted to gather in the golden harvest.

In proof of this glowing statement a large lump of the precious ore was displayed at the baron's private office to a select few,

who speedily spread the report of this wonderful gold find throughout the City.

Although, if the exact truth were told, that lump of ore suspiciously resembled the one shown to Alex Cameron as the product of the Grebenski Gold Mine.

The report of this immense gold find by the company's agents was to cause quite a run on the company's shares, which had of late been rather a drug in the market and hardly saleable at any price.

The next committee meeting after this report came to hand was a great success; the baron had it all his own way. His proposal that Alex Cameron should be appointed as the leader of a band of gentlemen emigrants was adopted unanimously, and orders given that Alex should have full power to select his following.

The baron took care to eulogize Alex as a young enthusiast, who was giving up position and wealth in his philanthropic zeal to benefit his fellow man.

If a clever and rising young barrister believed the baron's scheme of Universal Colonization would prove a success, who could be found sceptical enough to pooh-pooh the thing as empirical any longer? Of course philanthropy was the keynote of the whole organization, not that that hindered a few discordant notes being introduced here and there, but then as everything was conducted at high pressure, few had leisure to note the want of harmony throughout the entire performance. About this time the baron's opinions and the baron's doings were things to be taken note of and duly chronicled.

But what City men admired and wondered at was the baron's wonderful powers of construction and organization. As to his skill as a financier, and his talents for unravelling intricate money problems, not a man on 'Change could hold a candle to him. Merchant princes who at first looked somewhat askance at the new man no longer avoided his acquaintance; he was known to be a power in the moneyed world, and as such he was admired and courted. His prodigious success won their open respect, whereas a single failure would have at once sent him to Coventry.

The report of the great gold find on the Universal Colonization Company's territory added immensely to the baron's popu-

larity. Never had there been such a rush after shares in any company since the great South Sea Bubble.

The startling telegrams received almost daily from the company's agents, reporting further enormous discoveries of gold of a richness and permanence unparalleled in gold mining, were duly posted in the company's offices, and eagerly scanned by an excited crowd of shareholders and intending purchasers at any price.

It was commonly reported in the City that fortunes had been made by lucky speculators who purchased shares in the company a few weeks before the wonderful gold find became known and then sold out at five hundred per cent. premium.

The baron himself was reticent and oracular on this subject, but even his enemies declared that he was about the richest man on 'Change, as it was well known he had been induced to drop some of his shares at an enormous premium.

To the fortunate and rich man the world is ever ready to accord its homage, so it is possible that the baron was not by any means surprised to find that the doors of the most exclusive leaders of fashion were thrown open to him as if by magic.

Great ladies, who had so far forgotten their dainty surroundings as to do a little slumming in Whitechapel and Gravel Lane, by way of change, to vary the excitement of the hour, hailed the baron as the apostle of a new creed.

He had come to the rescue not of the outcasts of darkest London, but the impecunious ne'er-do-well hangers-on, that parasitic-like cling around the noble genealogical trees of most great houses. Every moneyed-man, from the duke to the well-to-do tradesman, knows to his cost what an irritating person this family ne'er-do-well hanger-on proves himself to be.

And, doubtless, many a noble lady also finds this class of family parasite a constant source of annoyance

However, be that as it may, the highest ladies of fashion took up the scheme for colonizing Africa with ne'er-do-wells and younger sons with their accustomed unreasoning zeal.

The gold find on the company's territory, as a matter of course, made quite a *furor* in the most select circles at the West End; but what took on most was the proposed plan of building a city on the plains around the shores of Lake Ngami.

The climate was declared on all hands to be most salubrious and quite suitable for Europeans.

In imagination they already pictured this fair city peopled by the impecunious irritating younger branches of the family, who were too far off to be any longer troublesome.

And then what a prospect this city held out to young ladies of uncertain age.

Churches must needs be built and missions established. The screaming sisterhood, who were constantly agitating for the rights of women, might emigrate in a body, and subjugate the tyrant man to their sway, in the soft enervating climate of Lake Ngami, where ways and means would no longer prove a barrier to the happy state of matrimony.

Such a *dénouement* to the vexed question of women's rights was a thing to be dreamed over, until to imaginative minds it became a reality.

What a grand conception this colonization scheme was ! Who but a noble, high-minded man could have thought it out for the good of his fellow-man ?

And then the baron was so large-hearted and open-handed, so strictly pious and orthodox, too. Did he not strictly enjoin that churches and church schools should be built in every colony ?

The gushing maidens of mature years, in their sweet simplicity, called him by turns a saint, a seraph and a sage.

When he chanced to find himself surrounded by a bevy of the above enthusiastic and charitably pious maidens, his deportment and conversation became at once admirable as well as edifying.

Solomon, with all his wisdom, could not have competed with this Nestor of the nineteenth century.

The pretty innocents gathered round him with clasped hands and wide-open admiring eyes, drinking in his words as though they found them sweeter than the morning dew, when he held forth on self-denial, self-abnegation, self-immolation and self-forgetting charity.

"What," he would ask, "was so sublime as the charity of woman ? Sweet, heroic woman !"

It was her charity that comforted the sick, clothed the naked, and sent Dives empty away.

Charity and piety were the chief ornaments of women.

He would ask for nothing more in the woman of his choice.

Piety in woman was a thing he adored. It was her shield, her breastplate. A pious maiden need fear no evil. She carried a charm about with her that purified the atmosphere she breathed.

Piety and charity. Oh! what God-like virtues they were, and only found in perfection in a woman's breast.

He, himself, gave for the pure gratification of seeing his fellow-creatures happy. He loved the charity that thinketh no evil. It was enough for him that he saw his brother in need, to stretch forth the helping hand towards him.

When he gave, he gave freely, and without question. It was enough for him to know that the poor unfortunates who craved his charity were helpless, hopeless and homeless. What right had he to inquire by what bye-paths they gained that end?

Such magnanimous, large-hearted ethics gained him universal respect and admiration from the gentler sex.

They quoted the baron on all possible occasions, and besieged their friends and acquaintances, on every hand, for contributions in aid of every known and unknown charity under the sun, until their dearest friends began to wish that they, too, were deported in a body to people the plains of Lake Ngami.

Neither did they fail to lay the dear baron under contribution also, and as he gave his gold freely and without question, they adored him all the more.

Rich folks begging for the thriftless sons of toil had long been the mode in "Vanity Fair." No lady of fashion was without half-a-dozen subscription lists, on which she insisted, in the sweetest manner possible, putting down every one who visited at her house.

Great ladies, as a rule, are not noted for open-handed charity. To put down their names as lady patronesses is generally the extent of their liberality in the cause of charity.

But then, they doubtless know the value of their names at the head of a begging circular. It makes the pill go down easily with the million, just as the name of a nobleman heading a testimonial list appertaining to cure-all pills, causes the said pills to be swallowed wholesale by the multitude, and a golden harvest is a foregone conclusion.

The baron, as we have said, gave his gold, when asked in the name of charity, liberally and without question, but he gave with the certainty that he should receive a hundredfold in return. What

to him were the few golden coins he gave to the haughty dames and demoiselles to fill up their numerous subscription lists, when by that simple process he found himself a popular and welcome guest in the most exclusive circles ?

True, a few cautious folks regarded the baron somewhat after the fashion of a society meteor, dazzling every eye by its brilliancy for a transient season, then vanishing into space, no one knows whither.

But even the cautious ones took care to treat the man of the hour with courteous politeness.

No one indeed could be found who dared treat the baron with open discourtesy. He had a sort of innate dignity about him that forbade familiarity of speech to mere passing acquaintance, and of bosom friends he had none, yet he might have counted intimate acquaintances by the thousand.

It was in the nature of this man to pose before the world in some sort of character.

He had acted the philanthropist so long that it would not have surprised him had he waked up some morning to find himself one in reality, and in such a case he would, most assuredly, have assumed the *rôle* of a misanthrope.

It was utterly impossible for such a man to form a true friendship with any one, seeing he was not true even to himself.

(To be continued.)

Lourdes.

PART I.

FIFTEEN years ago there was no New Town of Lourdes, and I had the good fortune to visit the Old Town before it had suffered from the hands of the innovator. It was still the Lourdes which had been part of King Jean's ransom after his capture at Poitiers.

One could not pass along the street of that old Lourdes without feeling transported into *les temps héroïques*, nor visit the Grotto without feeling inclined to affix a mediæval date to one's next letter.

No doubt there yet remain the quiet narrow streets, and picturesque dark tenements with high black roofs, and windows pierced in walls so thick that they exclude alike the cold of winter and the summer heat. But we are told of fine shops in the Place Marcadal, of cafés, chemists and coiffeurs, of shops that assault the eye with plate-glass windows in gay frames, and this in a place where no sign of commerce appeared, save a bush hung out above a door to intimate—in spite of the proverb—that good wine was sold within. My visit was happily timed before stray bits of the Palais Royal were dropped into a mediæval town.

I was staying in primitive lodgings recommended to me by English friends who knew the *propriétaire*, Madame Josephe Baranque.

My oak-floored bedroom was over what in more pretentious places would have been called *la porte cochère*, and the white-curtained windows looked down on the street. There, passing along the broken slabs of black marble which formed the pavement, were dark-eyed girls in scarlet *capelines*, bare-footed women carrying huge bundles of faggots on their heads, and sometimes a good-looking young mountaineer clad in short jacket, fawn colour breeches and bright sash, his feet protected by sandals and his head by the cap worn jauntily on one side, which, but for its long gay tassel, is so like the Tam o' Shanter.

My sitting-room was entered from a gallery open to the sky,

and there one had a view of the rocky hills thinly clothed with grass, which rise abruptly from the plain and hide the snow-capped mountains from the town. The nearest looked so near it seemed as if a well-directed stone flung from my gallery would be buried in its side.

In December the air grew so cold that I demanded a fire, and Madame Josephe promised to get me a donkey load of wood.

"A donkey-cart full of wood?" I asked.

"No, two panniers full, the wood piled up and meeting over the donkey's back."

I naturally thought of the days of Gaston de Foix; for when he complained of cold, did not one of his knights run down to the courtyard, and lifting to his shoulders one of the donkeys that stood there laden with fuel, did he not carry it, wood and all, up the gallery stairs to the admiration of all beholders?

The exploit seems mythical, and Froissart was not present to bear witness to the truth of the tale. He tells it as 'twas told to him by a garrulous old knight as they rode together to Orthais. Anyhow it pleased me that I got my wood as knight and noble, baker and cook, got theirs 1,400 years ago.

In the winter evenings I invited Madame Josephe, while she drank a cup of my English tea, to tell me what she knew about the apparitions and miracles.

I had heard of both at Pau, and there the story went that a little peasant fourteen years of age had seen a young English lady who had wandered from a picnic to the Grotto, and had mistaken her for la Sainte Vierge.

Another story is devoutly believed by French Protestants. They say a lady had appointed to meet an officer from Tarbes at the Grotto, and finding Bernadette there passed herself off as Marie.

This story finds favour with the French army: what could be more likely than an interview granted by *la plus belle* to *le plus vaillant*?

But one must ask how either lady could scramble up the sides of the Grotto, and stand on a ledge six or eight feet from the floor.

And in February, even in the mild climate of the South, neither would probably have wandered about in a white gown and blue sash, arms, neck and head exposed to the spring

breeze. Madame Josephe had heard both stories and laughed them to scorn.

"And you knew Bernadette Soubirous?"

"I was with her when she saw la Sainte Vierge. We used to kneel while she knelt, but we could see nothing. She could see Marie; her eyes were fixed on the spot where the image now stands."

"And when the Virgin spoke, could you not hear?"

"We could hear nothing, though the Blessed Virgin spoke several times. She told Bernadette that she could not promise her happiness here, but hereafter. And when the child asked her who she was, she answered, 'Je suis l'immaculée conception.'"

"Did she use those very words?"

"She did not say, *je suis*; la Sainte Vierge spoke the patois."

"Oh, she spoke the patois," I repeated, and I thought it was a far cry from Syro-Chaldaic to Gascon patois; but if a heavenly message is to be delivered, it must necessarily be spoken in a tongue understood of the people.

After thus announcing herself, Marie desired the little girl to tell the priests to build a chapel over the Grotto, and having said this she disappeared.

Bernadette rose from her knees and turned towards the town, repeating in a low voice, "L'immaculée conception." The crowd heard and repeated the words, shouting, "Marie, l'immaculée conception," till the girl reached the house of *le curé*.

She went in and delivered her message.

The *curé*, Mons. Peyramale, listened incredulously. "If," said he, "you tell me falsehoods about la Sainte Vierge, you will never see her in heaven."

But Bernadette adhered to her story, and at last he was convinced that she spoke truthfully. His church believed that miracles have never ceased, and if the child was neither insane nor an impostor, there could be no room for doubt.

The doctor of the town declared that Bernadette, though delicate and *chétive*, was not subject to hallucinations,* and so

* Bernadette had another hallucination the night before she died. She thought she had a personal encounter with the devil. Other sane persons have seen phantom cats, dogs and skeletons; but the girl's devout mind brought before her that which she revered and that which she most feared and detested.

far Madame Josephe respected his opinion ; but I noticed that in speaking of another matter in which she happened to disagree with him, she inadvertently confessed that he was *un vieux imbécile*.

The crowds which surrounded Bernadette on her way to the Grotto, kneeling with her there and accompanying her to her poor home, gave umbrage to the civil authorities. They barred the entrance to the Grotto ; Bernadette and the crowd knelt outside. A gendarme flicked his fingers before the girl's eyes, saying, "Que vois-tu ? que vois-tu ?" But Bernadette continued to gaze in ecstasy on the spot where the Virgin seemed to her to be standing, and was insensible to the presence of the rude official.

Authorities cannot, however, be lightly disregarded. Bernadette, her friend Madame Josephe, and another woman were summoned before the court of correctional police at Pau on a charge of spreading false reports.

Poor Josephe was in much alarm. She could not walk so far as Pau, and she was at that time gathering together the little coins that ultimately made her mistress of a comfortable home. How was she to bear the expense of the journey ? and would she be able to escape a prison ? The good-natured doctor settled the first question by taking her, the other woman and the chief offender, Bernadette, at his own expense to Pau.

Before her judge the girl, unabashed by the crowd of spectators, told her story with such firmness and simplicity that no one present could doubt that she spoke what she believed to be the truth ; and Madame Josephe's great black eyes flashed with triumph as, more than twenty years after the event, she repeated the judge's sentence, "*Les femmes sont acquittées.*"

Much has been said and written about the miraculous spring which supplies baths for the crowds of sick pilgrims. The Virgin told Bernadette to drink of the water and bathe in it, pointing to a spot where as yet no water had appeared. "There was a little moisture then," Josephe ingenuously admitted, enough, one may add, to make the earth soft and the little pebbles loose, or the girl's thin fingers would have dug in vain. She got a few drops to drink, and she bathed her face. She had lighted on one of the many springs which trickle down from the mountains to the Gare. Stronger hands than hers have dug more effectually

and have conducted the water to the side of the Grotto, meeting, probably, on the way some less holy streams which have increased the volume of water. It is conveyed to the pilgrims by a row of bright brass cocks, the appearance of which awakens associations neither hallowed nor romantic.

We have been told of the abundant perennial flow of water, but it would appear that much economy has to be practised, so that a hundred diseased pilgrims are plunged into the same bath !

Bernadette did not deliver her message in vain. No mere chapel stands above the Grotto, but a tall white basilica. The benevolent face of Pio Nono—a beautiful mosaic—looks down from the tower, and above it rises the slender spire. Inside, the walls are one mass of votive offerings, and banners of silk and velvet tell of pilgrims from all parts of the world. The beaver of Canada is there, the stars and stripes of America, the shamrock of Ireland and the arms of England.

On the white marble walls are inscribed prayers and thanks—not so much for miraculous cures as for all the blessings of this life.

Here are a few specimens selected from many hundred similar :

To my mother, Marie Immaculée, the cause of all my joys, thanks, thanks, and love.—G. B. L.

Homage and gratitude to Mary for the Christian death of my father.

An unhappy family confide themselves for ever to our Lady of Lourdes. They ask for conversion, holy courage, union, and a holy death.

Our Lady of Lourdes, who dost console so many, I place my family under thy protection. 1874.

Our Lady of Lourdes has given me back my son ; may she protect us always.

Glory to Jesus, Marie, Joseph. J. R. has been cured.

Holy Mary, pray for us.—J. WALSH, Bishop of London, Canada.

A grateful mother to our Lady of Lourdes for a conversion, and grace obtained.—Amsterdam, E. S.

Mille compliments à Marie. (!)

In 1872, a national pilgrimage took place, started by laymen and organized by a committee of ladies. On the 8th of October, trains arrived continually, bringing fresh relays of pilgrims until their number amounted to 20,000,* and then four hundred and forty banners glistened in the sun.

* More than double that number of pilgrims arrived in one day in 1893.

The banner of France came first, and was followed by two others draped in crape, while the bearers wore mourning ; these were the banners of Alsace and Lorraine.

The archbishop of the province kissed the mourning flags and the crowd shed tears for their countrymen in the lost provinces.

Equally dear to Frenchmen must be the banners of those whose red flag in its hour of victory was stained by the blood of an archbishop. It was indeed a triumph for Lourdes to receive pilgrims not only from Lyons and Marseilles but from Montmartre and Villette.

In the evening, the hill above the Grotto was aflame with Bengal fire and lights of various hues, while at the summit letters of fire suddenly appeared forming the motto :

“VIVE NOTRE DAME DE LOURDES !”

The words were repeated by the shouts of the 20,000 pilgrims. On the second day, the image of The Virgin was crowned “with solemn pomp.” The crown cost 25,000 francs.

For this description I am indebted to the work of M. de la Grèzes, published at Tarbes, and well known to visitors to the Grotto.

Winter is not the time for pilgrimages, but I naturally heard much about the miracles ; those of which Madame Josephe told me, and of which she had been a witness, seemed to me to be recoveries from natural causes.

For instance, a young girl came to be cured of what appeared to Josephe a terrible disease ; “she made a noise like a cow,” from which curious statement I gathered that the poor girl was suffering from a very severe attack of bronchial asthma, and relieved her labouring breath at intervals by one loud hollow cough. She spent some time at Lourdes, and, no doubt, the mountain air had done much for her before the apparently sudden cure which took place as she entered the basilica. The steep ascent to the church and the heat of the southern sunshine had tried her breath, she passed into the cool nave, took a few slow steps onward, and felt instant relief ; she had not breathed so freely for many a day.

“It was the miracle for which she had prayed,” and with the thought came the excitement which ensured her recovery. There is no doctor like joy ; many asthmatic patients will take this view of her case.

Another cure was described to me by a lady I met at Lourdes. She was boarding in a convent where a young *demoiselle* was also staying who had become alarmingly ill ; she had refused to eat till food nauseated her and her limbs were apparently rigid and powerless. Thinking herself the victim of catalepsy, she believed that a miracle alone could cure her, and she sent for some water from the Grotto of Massatielle. When it arrived she was in a state of intense excitement ; she said to my informant, "The case has been opened, I took out one of the bottles and felt as if I had *l'enfant* Jesus himself in my arms."

Would not any hysterical girl be cured in such a moment of supreme exultation ?

She drank the water and was rubbed with it, and soon exclaimed, "Give me something to eat !" The superior thought this a passing fancy, but ordered food and wine to be brought, and the invalid, who had been wont to declare she could not swallow, ate and drank, rose and walked about the room. The Superior was in ecstasy ; a miracle had been wrought—and in her convent. The news spread like wildfire ; the nuns crowded to the sick chamber to see the "*miraculée* ;" there were congratulations, tears and hymns of praise. The girl became the object of wondering glances, which followed her wherever she went ; she was the idol of the convent, life had assumed a new aspect and the cure was complete.

Any disorder which has its origin in hysteria or weak nerves would naturally be cured by the change and excitement of a journey to Lourdes, provided always that the pilgrim believed a miracle to be possible.

When a crowd of 20,000 persons is moved by the same hopes and fears, its influence is tremendous and all-powerful to effect a certain class of cures.

But I noticed that a blind man and a woman with a maimed hand frequented the Grotto, and I asked how it was they were not cured ; Madame Josephe promptly replied, "*Mais, la Sainte Vierge* will not cure everybody. I know parents who come every year to pray for their daughter, she has fits, and she is not cured." In fact the proportion of those cured is, we have been lately told, only ten per cent.

It is to be regretted that M. Zola in his recent work on Lourdes has introduced fictitious characters, for who can tell .

where the historian ends and the novelist begins? His graphic description of the start of the white train from Paris one may at least conclude to be a true picture.

At 5.30 on an August morning, which gave promise of a sultry day, the pilgrims ended their chant of "Ave Maria, star of the sea," as the trains passed the fortifications. The third-class carriage consisted of five compartments, only divided by wooden partitions, so low that it was easy for those in one compartment to be friendly with their next neighbours. The whole company could see all over the carriage. There was no luggage van, and the pilgrims were encumbered by *impedimenta*—deal boxes, hat boxes, bags and a lamentable array of shabby parcels tied up with pack-thread. Hanging from the brass hooks were well-worn garments, parcels and baskets, all swaying with every movement of the train. In the midst of this rag-fair lay the pilgrims on their narrow mattresses, sadly shaken by the oscillation of the train and jolted by the rumbling jerks of the wheels.

Among them a girl, who had been gently nurtured, was stretched on a mattress laid on a *chaise longue*, the wheels of which rested against the bench, ready to be screwed on at the end of the journey. At her feet sat a mother holding in her arms a little girl of seven years old, who had never walked or spoken—an emaciated little creature who could only utter plaintive cries. Her mother, a seamstress by trade, was bringing her to Lourdes with thirty sous in her purse and a bottle of milk for the child. On the opposite seat was the wife of a commercial traveller whose husband had deserted her. She was going to pray at the Grotto for a renewal of his love. Her next neighbour was a man paralyzed in his legs, the position of which his wife was obliged continually to change. He was a professor of the Lycée Charlemagne, but he and his wife were poorly dressed, and he was travelling as a hospital patient, hoping that this act of humility would find favour with the Virgin. He had franked a man really poor in order that the mortification of his pride might not be balanced by the weight of his purse.

Among the smaller discomforts of the journey was the hoarse voice of a girl in the last stage of consumption, who persisted in talking, though continually stopped by a frightful fit of coughing. Another young woman was thickly veiled, and the

very sufficient cause is minutely explained by M. Zola. It is not pleasant reading this too graphic description, but is not Zola a synonym of realism?

The pilgrim nearest his journey's end was a man who had never spoken since he entered the compartment. Nobody knew him, but somebody said he had arrived three minutes before the train started, and had thrown himself into the corner, where he sat motionless. When asked his name he answered, "Je souffre, oh! je souffre!" Presently a whisper ran through the carriage that he was dying, and from that moment he became a source of great anxiety to the sister in charge, lest he would pass away without the "holy oils." His pilgrimage ended half-an-hour before the arrival at Lourdes.

After some time the compartments acquired the heat of a furnace, the windows were closed, as a stormy wind had risen which, it was feared, would have caused many of the invalids an access of coughing. The air of the carriage was vitiated by the breath of the diseased, and rendered offensive by the scent of old garments, old packages and varieties of food, for the pilgrims ate and drank, while the sisters attended to all the requirements of the sick and helpless. When this state of things became unendurable, the windows were partially opened, and the hot dust blew in *à cre et brulante*.

La Sainte Vierge must be less considerate and sympathetic than she showed herself at Cana if she is not grieved by this terrible journey of twenty-two hours, and would not hear a prayer in hospital or garret, rather than all the Aves intoned in the white train, supposing always that prayer can reach her in her home of rest and glory.

PART II.

So attractive are the Grotto and the basilica that few visitors ascend to the castle; though Englishmen might feel some pride in being reminded that the Black Prince's victory at Poitiers was felt at the foot of the Pyrenees.

For the Castle of Lourdes was during more than seventy years held for England against all comers.

It is perched on a rock which rises perpendicularly out of one of the streets, and the steep ascent has in modern times been made practicable by a hundred steps. When they are mounted

a deep fissure in the rock would cause an enemy some delay, but for seventy years, no enemy was allowed to climb so high.

At the time of which I write, a plank did duty for a drawbridge, and the cackle of geese brought out the *châtelaine*, who lent the key of the old tower. Another hundred steps in a winding staircase led to the summit of the tower, which commands a wide view of the fertile southern plain. To the north rise the precipitous rocky hills that hide the snow-capped Pyrenees.

Across that plain, along a road near which the railway now runs, our Black Prince and his princess must have come when they visited Lourdes in 1363. They had been staying at Tarbes, then a fortified town, defended by a wall and nine towers, and during their sojourn there as guests of Jean d'Armagnac, a trifling incident occurred characteristic of their times. Gaston Comte de Foix had come to meet the royal pair, and d'Armagnac, for reasons of his own, received him gladly. There had been an hereditary quarrel between his family and the Counts de Foix; he had himself been Gaston's prisoner and still owed him his ransom of 25,000 francs. The moment of a royal visit seemed a favourable one for obtaining some reduction from a sum which for those days was a large one, and d'Armagnac entreated his guests to use their influence on his behalf.

The prince declined to interfere. He naturally had a fellow-feeling for the claimant of a ransom. "Monseigneur my father," he said, "would not be pleased if any one begged us to remit what we won by adventure and good fortune at Poitiers."

This was conclusive so far as the prince was concerned. D'Armagnac, therefore, turned to the princess, and entreated her to speak for him to the count. She undertook the office of mediatrix with no reluctance, and begged Gaston to accept a lower sum. In reply he mendaciously assured her that he was poor, that he wanted money to complete the building of his castle at Pau, and could not relinquish the ransom to which by the laws of chivalry he was fully entitled. But the Fair Maid of Kent, the grand-daughter of Edward I. and heiress of his son, Prince Edward, was not accustomed to have her requests denied, and determined to get the money for d'Armagnac in another manner. She asked Gaston to make her a present, and this the baffled count could not refuse. He—no doubt with much reluctance

—gave the princess 25,000 francs, and these she transferred to the purse of d'Armagnac.

Perhaps as she passed through the gates of Tarbes on her way to Lourdes she flattered herself that at the age of thirty-five the influence of her beauty could still be felt.

Arrived at Lourdes, the Prince of Wales at once appreciated the strength of the castle, and committed the charge of it to one of his knights, Pierre Ernaut, who was cousin to the Count de Foix.

"Messire Pierre," he said, "I institute and make you Captain and Castelain of Lourdes and Bigorre. Keep the castle so as you may render a good account to Monseigneur my father and to me."

To which the chevalier simply replied, "Monseigneur, volontiers."

A man of few words, it would seem, but of many achievements.

When two of the barons of Bigorre "*se tournèrent François*" and took Tarbes, Ernaut "*fit guerre grande et forte*" and brought from Béarn and Gascony six captains, each followed by fifty lances and a great number of adventurous companions, and with them his brother, Jean de Béarn. Thus reinforced, the garrison of Lourdes swept the country in every direction, bringing back prisoners to be ransomed and a harvest of provisions for the castle.

In allusion to certain promises made by the Prince of Wales (whom, by-the-bye, Froissart never styles the Black Prince) M. de la Grèzes observes: "If the English tried to flatter the people by the concession of privileges, one sees that the life they led at Lourdes could hardly suit our peaceful population." This is rather amusing, seeing that the garrison were Frenchmen harrying their native land; but we are doubtless to understand that those who acknowledged Edward III. for their king "*se tournèrent Anglais*."

Against this hornet's nest came the Duc d'Anjou, brother to Charles V., a fiery young prince, of whom it is related that, seeing the cup-bearer hand the wine to the King of England before he presented it to the captive King Jean, Anjou, a boy of fourteen, started from the table and boxed the cup-bearer's ears for first serving Edward, "who was but a vassal to the King of France."

This gasconading prince came to Lourdes determined to take the castle and make himself master of the town. But he found the place fully prepared for him; Lourdes was deserted—its inhabitants had all taken refuge in the castle, and neither man nor woman was left in its silent streets.

Then there were fierce skirmishes, for the besieged came down from their rock and attacked the besiegers, while the castle defied every effort to reach it, and in his encounters with the garrison Anjou found he lost more than he gained. He, therefore, tried diplomacy and offered to buy the garrison at a high price if the *chastelain* would surrender the castle.

To this Pierre Ernaut replied that he could neither sell nor alienate the heritage of the King of England; that he was no traitor and would hold it till death.

On receiving this answer the duke departed, having first set fire to the town—a tragic sight to those who, looking down from the ramparts, beheld the destruction of their homes.

Anjou went his way revolving fresh schemes for obtaining the impregnable little fortress. With this end in view he sent a messenger to Gaston de Foix to conclude a secret treaty between himself and that powerful and unscrupulous count. He then retired to Toulouse, and de Foix sent messages to his cousin Pierre Ernaut, desiring him to come and speak with him at Orthais.

Pierre suspected treachery, but considered that he ought not to show distrust of his cousin, and determined to go; first summoning the garrison, and thus addressing his brother in their presence:

“I know that the Count de Foix has long coveted certain possessions—the Castle of Mauvoisin, for instance, and perhaps a treaty has been made between him and the Duc d’Anjou. But while I live the Castle of Lourdes I will never give up, save to my lord, the King of England. If I establish you in my place, fair brother, you must swear to me by your faith and *gentillesse*, that in the form and manner that I keep the castle, you will keep it, and neither for life nor death will fail to defend it.”

Jean de Béarn took the oath, and his brother gave him the castle keys, crossed the drawbridge, descended from the rock and took the way to Orthais.

At first he was hospitably received by the count, who kept

great state at Orthais, entertaining archbishops and nobles at his own table, and at the second table bishops and knights, while minstrels and *trouvères* were ever welcome guests.

After a few days the object of his invitation to Pierre became apparent, and he was urged to surrender the Castle of Lourdes. On his refusal the count reviled him as a false traitor and stabbed him with his dagger. Pierre exclaimed, "Ha, monseigneur, vous ne faites pas gentillesse ; vous m'avez mandé, et c'est ainsi que vous m'assassinez."

In reply Gaston struck him again, and then had him carried to the castle dungeon, where he died of his wounds.

We may hope that the minstrels and *trouvères* whom Gaston decked in cloth of gold tore off his gorgeous gifts, and fled from this scene of treachery to sing a lament for their patron's lost honour and for the fate of brave Pierre Ernaut.

Strange that Gaston de Foix, himself a musician and a poet, should have shown so little *gentillesse* !

But his ideas were original. In his work on "La Chasse," he observes, "In hunting we fly from mortal sin ; now, he who flies from mortal sin will, according to our belief, be saved. So the hunter has in this world joy and paradise hereafter," a doctrine which must commend itself to sporting men of every period.

Neither Anjou nor de Foix were the gainers by Pierre's assassination. Jean de Béarn kept his oath to his brother, and held the castle for England. After the death of Edward III., Richard II. confirmed his appointment as Chastelain of Lourdes, and the castle and town continued to be an English possession through the reigns of Henry IV. and Henry V.

After the death of our gallant "Harry," Lourdes was taken by Jean de Foix, the successor of Gaston and the companion of La Hire and the Maid of Orleans.

FRANCES DEW.

"The Old Order Changeth."

By GORDON ROY,
Author of "HIS COUSIN ADAIR," etc.

'MORNING SERVICE at 9.30 a.m.'

There it was plainly printed. No, it was not he who had mistaken the hour. Was it possible that, after having looked forward with some unconfessed alarm to the intellectual, fashionable, and doubtless critical audience which would await him at Funkelbad, there was to be no audience at all? The situation was decidedly absurd, but even to the least vain of men it was somewhat mortifying too. Laying dignity aside, the Rev. Ambrose Austin, the newly-arrived chaplain for the month, rose and, with a half laugh at himself, peered out of the tiny lancet window and down the path that led up from the big hotel to the little chapel on the hill. In that bare morsel of a room, with its solitary chair and table, his tall, stooping figure, in its straight, white surplice, and his grave, abstracted face were rather suggestive of some member of one of the more learned and contemplative monastic orders in his cell. And that good brother could not have been much more out of touch with the world and its ways, less "up to date," than Mr. Austin. After his brilliant Oxford career he had settled down in his out-of-the-way parish, becoming more of a student and a recluse every year, till, like many another scholar, it seemed as if all his labours might have no issue, for want of the crystallizing touch to give them some definite form. His books were his friends, his world. Why should he leave them, then? What had induced him this autumn to break through the habit of years, and accept the month's chaplaincy at Funkelbad, he himself could hardly have told. "Kismet" was, perhaps, the only explanation. He had asked himself that question often enough, after some helpless struggle with Bradshaw, which remained a sealed book to him yet, or after some bewildering encounter with fussily-important railway officials, with whose language, had it only been Hebrew or Chaldee, he would have been perfectly familiar,

but unfortunately it had never occurred to him to waste time on modern tongues. Here, however, he was, in Funkelbad at last, but after having surmounted all the difficulties of the way, it was rather an anti-climax to find that, apparently, he must act both priest and congregation too.

Steps in the chapel at last! Mr. Austin quitted his Sister Anne position, but it was only after the silence had been broken more than once by that discreet little cough, so expressive of expectation and veiled impatience, that he summoned up courage to face his congregation. And a more alarming one he had never confronted. On the front row of chairs three ladies were seated, a mother and her daughters very evidently, the latter somewhat elderly young persons. The trio, with their pale eyes, neutral-tinted hair and complexions, their angular shoulders and narrow chests accentuated by severely-correct drab travelling costumes, looked like so many figures cut out of whitey-brown paper, in the utter absence of any warmth of life or colour.

Under the battery of those six eyes, Mr. Austin advanced to the reading-desk, and, trying to stifle a gasp of dismay, was beginning the service, when the sunshine, streaming in through the open door, was darkened, and a fourth worshipper appeared to swell the ranks of the Funkelbad devout—a girl, fresh, wholesome-looking, clear-faced, wearing the serge skirt and cotton blouse and sailor hat which is the holiday attire of ninety-nine out of every hundred young and middle-aged Englishwomen—an attire, it may be said in parenthesis, which may vary with the wearer from the daintiest trimness to the extreme of slatternliness. Impossible, however, to associate any idea of the latter—of the flopping, shapeless limpness, or, still worse, that yawning rift between skirt and blouse which makes this serviceable combination too often a sight to shudder at—with this erect, well-knit damsel, in her snowy frills and well-hung, workmanlike skirt. Under the sailor-hat was a good broad brow, shaded by bright brown hair, but there was no time to see more, for the new-comer, after one glance round, ducked her head with suspicious haste into the correct devotional posture.

Poor Mr. Austin, to whom a congregation had hitherto been an abstraction, a something to be prayed with and preached at, a vague mass out of which he had never been able to pick an individual face, was instantly certain that he had seen a smile

flicker over her face before it disappeared behind her folded hands. As the service went on his discomfort increased. Funkelbad was a bathing place, and with some vague recollections of Baden in its palmy days, with a dash of Monaco thrown in, he had thought it his duty to prepare a special sermon on all the sins and frivolities of this wicked world, so far, good man, as they were known to him. How was he to deliver this philippic, he was asking himself in growing dismay, to these four blameless women. But there was no help for it, so on he plunged through warning and denunciation, trying to look in every other direction than towards that corner where a pair of brown eyes were unmistakably twinkling at some of his Dantean periods. Would it never be over? In vain he tried to fix his eyes on roof or window, on the paper before him, or, as a last resort, on those three neutral faces, composed to a decorous, stony, listening blank. It was no use; back his glance would turn in helpless appeal. Like some one struggling out of a nightmare, he rushed at last out into the fresh air and the presence of the hills, conscious for the moment of but one fervent wish, that he might never encounter any of those four women again.

Funkelbad, as every one knows, has but two reasons for existence, the baths and the Funkel Pass—that huge precipice that overhangs the tiny town, and whose Titan bastions are ascended and descended by a ceaseless stream of tourists, who spend a night in Funkelbad, and then vanish into the unknown out of which they came. The bathing community, especially the English portion of it, chooses to regard the nomadic horde of tourists with extreme contempt. In the hotels its members gather together in a certain corner of the *salon*, at a certain end of a certain table in the dining-room; while under the salt, represented at the Hôtel des Bains by a big artificial bignonia, the ever-shifting tourist population is accommodated. This distinction Mr. Austin mastered afterwards, but when he took his place at the *table d'hôte* he could notice nothing except that all the sharers in the morning's disaster were present, the family party seated next to him and the girl almost opposite. He was grateful for the big plant, which served in some measure as a screen, though ever and again his sense of discomfort was renewed by catching a quick glance from the brown eyes through the dusty red leaves. He was not allowed much time, however,

for rueful recollection, for the whitey-brown lady immediately took him in hand.

"Ah, Mr. Austin," she began, "we feel so indebted to you, my dear girls and I, for that sermon this morning. We have not heard anything like it this season. This season—years, I might say!"

"Oh please," murmured poor Austin, not without some inward amusement at the compliment, which was not unworthy of the late Bishop of Winchester, "you are very good, but really I would rather not——"

"But you really must let me speak. I always believe in saying *just* what I think. I fear it has made me some enemies, but one should be sincere above all things; don't you think so? My only regret is that those who really *ought* to have heard you were not present. Now there is Mrs. Aylmer, with a baccarat party in her rooms, and cigarettes and champagne going all night—so I am told, for of course I know nothing of her. Now, had you not her in your mind to-day?"

"Why, seeing that I only arrived last night, Mrs.——?"

"Tregarthen, the real Cornish 'Tre;' you know the old rhyme, of course. But about Mrs. Aylmer and her set; of course it was stupid of me to imagine you could know about her; still you described them to the life. I sat all the time of your sermon thinking how applicable it was to her, and to—but no, I won't mention any name; you will allow me to say it, though, that I feel sure you are going to be a great *comfort* to us. My wretched health has driven us abroad, but my dear girls miss their parish work so much. Mr. Bone, our vicar, such a dear saintly man, used to say they were his two right hands. Our last chaplain here was a champion tennis-player, but for anything else——" and the whitey-brown head was shaken ominously.

So the stream flowed on, interspersed now and again by a sudden little question, till before the end of dinner, though Austin was all unaware of it, Mrs. Tregarthen had a very fair idea of the position and prospects of the rector of Silcote. It was far from unsatisfactory apparently, for her assiduities increased, and one or other of the late vicar's right hands (rather an awkward complement of even so useful a member) even ventured an occasional timid remark from under mamma's wing.

Austin, with a sigh to the memory of his years of solitary

dinners with a book flanking his plate, did his duty manfully. If a woman was good enough to talk to him, it was surely the least he could do to listen and to reply; but his listening must have been somewhat intermittent, as more than once, when a reply became necessary, the subject seemed to have changed suddenly. After the last of these lapses, he found, on coming to the surface, that Mrs. Tregarthen was in the full tide of that endless subject, the New Woman, her doings, and still more her misdoings.

"Now, tell me, Mr. Austin," she was saying, "do you think it right for girls to travel alone? My dear girls have never gone half an hour's railway journey alone; but perhaps I *may* be over careful, though I doubt if any *mother* can be that. But do you think that a girl can be really *nice*, really *modest*, if she knocks about with her knapsack among all sorts of people, and walks quite coolly into a big hotel, and sits down *alone* at table with strangers? Don't you think there must be some want of—er—delicacy, of fineness of fibre?"

Austin, though he could have discoursed exhaustively on the position of the sex in the reign of Seti or of Artaxerxes, knew little enough about the New Woman or any other. His housekeeper was the only living specimen of whom he had any intimate knowledge. His ideal woman was founded on a feeble miniature of the young mother who had died in giving him birth, in which the poor girl was represented with the falling ringlets, the impossibly large eyes, and tiny simpering mouth, which made up the accepted standard of female beauty of that day. This gentle effigy had largely coloured his ideas about women, whom he regarded, when he thought of them at all, as sensitive, fragile creatures to be sedulously shielded and taken care of. The modern maiden, as he had seen her at railway stations and in hotels, had administered some very rude shocks to this archaic conception, to which, in consequence, he clung all the more closely; so when Mrs. Tregarthen paused impressively for a reply, he answered with more energy than she had expected:

"I cannot say much on the general question, for really I have never thought about it, but all I can say is, that if any woman were connected with me, I would never permit her to do such a thing, nor to run the risk of the coarsening and hardening process that seems to attend it—so far at least as my small experience goes."

Mrs. Tregarthen permitted herself an almost imperceptible nod of triumph, and darted a glance across the table, which said unmistakably, "There, now, what do you think of that?"

Austin involuntarily followed her glance, and encountered, through the bignonia leaves, the eyes of the girl opposite. A cold chill ran over him. Very evidently *she* was alone. That florid, spectacled "Herr" beside her, who was pursuing "*petits pois*" over his plate with the blade of his knife, and from thence transferring them to an amply opened mouth, could not possibly have any connection with her, neither could that crumpled looking elderly Frenchwoman on her other hand.

Good Heavens, what had he been entrapped into saying? If only he had observed sooner, he would have stated his convictions a little more gently. He was meditating some possible softening of his opinion, when an elderly Aberdonian (judging from his accent) struck in eagerly with:

"Ye may say that, sir, and some of them must be gey well hardened, when they've got beyond the petticoats, and there's no saying what'll be next. 'Deed, if I were a young man, I'd be quaking in my shoes at the rate the lasses are coming on. Did ye see them in Paris, ma'am? They call it bicycle dress, I'm told, but I saw them walking about as bold as brass and not a bit of a bicycle near them. I'm sure," chuckling, "I turned as red as a turkey cock, old man though I am, at the first one I saw, but I soon got over glowering and blushing. Me blushing, that's a good one," with another laugh. "Did ye see them, sir?" as Mrs. Tregarthen accorded only a glassy stare to this unlooked-for ally.

"I did. I was horrified—revolted," said the clergyman in brief disgusted accents, and then glanced across at the young lady, as if to apologize for such a subject being introduced in her presence. But her eyes were fixed on her plate, her mouth somewhat set, as if to prevent the lips quivering into a smile, her expression inscrutable, though far from presenting the careful blank of the Misses Tregarthen's well-drilled countenances.

"It is hard lines for the man 'whose wife wears the breeks,' as we say in Scotland; the gray mare the better horse, as you would say," went on the irrepressible Aberdonian, quite unconscious that by this time he ought to have been shrivelled into silence under the pale fire of Mrs. Tregarthen's eye-glass; "but if the

lassies are going to sport them in this way, I don't see what's to become of us poor men at all," looking smilingly round.

But at this point Mrs. Tregarthen rose, with an air of shaking the dust off her garments, and in the general move out to the terrace the great subject of Rational Dress ceased from troubling for the time.

The terrace was brilliantly lighted by the strong yellow glare from the long rows of windows, mingling somewhat inharmoniously with the blue blaze of the electric lights, set here and there amid the scanty shrubs of the garden. A "Tyrolean" band of very doubtful nationality was performing what purported to be native airs, to which strains the whole hotel population was pacing up and down, laughing, talking, flirting. Mrs. Tregarthen and her dear girls had grouped themselves round a comfortable chair, suggestively empty. It was destined to remain so, as far as Mr. Austin was concerned, for after one distracted glance round he fled incontinently to the darkest shades of the garden—to a lower terrace that overhung the racing river, whose turbid waters glanced white through the darkness. In the faint spiritual light of a star-sown sky, the vast black bulk of the precipice reared itself up into mid-heaven. Stars, silence, and the soothing sound of water—with a little sigh of pleasure, he leaned over the balustrade, and then started to find that he was not alone, that another lover of quietness was there before him. It was the solitary young lady. His first impulse was to further flight, but he lingered irresolute.

Poor thing, she had doubtless felt all the lonelier among the crowd, and had taken refuge in this quiet place. Perhaps he ought to speak to her, to apologize if he could. And with a heroic effort he produced some original remarks on the beauty of the night, to which the girl responded in a pleasant, cordial voice. Austin was recovering from his surprise at finding himself in easy talk with a young, unknown woman, and was wondering how he could approach his subject, when she suddenly said :

"Of course we ought not to be talking at all, seeing we have not been introduced, but I rather wonder that you countenance me at all, Mr. Austin, when you disapprove so much of ladies who travel alone."

He could not see her face, but he could *hear* the smile in her voice .

"I assure you, if only I had known, I should never have spoken as I did. I was greatly distressed."

"But though you had not said what you did, you would have thought the same?"

"Well," said Austin hesitating, "I suppose I am|very old-fashioned in thinking that women should be taken care of, and as they preserve for us a purer higher ideal we should keep them apart from rough contact with the world. I own I cannot bear to see girls being pushed about and elbowing their own way, as I have seen lately."

"I wonder," gazing meditatively down into the swift milky waters, "if I am becoming 'coarse and hard;' if the 'process' has begun already."

"I entreat you to remember that I was only speaking in the most general way, that I——" words failed him.

"But if it is possible, as you think it is, why should I flatter myself that I shall escape?"

If Austin had been the least versed in the ways of the world, he had an opportunity for a pretty speech. Perhaps the girl thought that it might seem as if she had invited one, for she hastily shifted her ground, saying mischievously:

"I own I did not know the dangers of Funkelbad, when I risked coming here, but I cannot say now that I have not been warned. Certainly, to look at it, one would not imagine it was such a dreadfully wicked little place," waving her hand to where, under the wide and silent night, the few faint lights of the little town were twinkling.

Austin laughed. "It is cruel to remind me of that. Is that your revenge? If I make open confession that I was speaking of what I knew nothing about, will you agree to forget about this morning, if that is possible, and my unlucky speech at dinner too?"

"I don't know if absolution can be granted in that wholesale fashion. I agree not to *spea*k at least about this morning again, but don't you think that you could extend your confession a little further, and admit that you may have something to learn on the other subject too—that there may be a more serviceable ideal for this work-a-day world than that of yours, which has to be carefully kept on a top shelf in case it should get chipped or soiled?"

While they had been talking the moon had been slowly climbing the sky, and even as the girl spoke the great white disc topped the crags and flooded the valley with light. The sudden radiance falling upon the upturned, smiling face might almost have seemed to Austin an answer to her saucy speech—the new type, the more serviceable ideal, presented in bodily form before him. Instead of the drooping ringlets, the full soft hair swept back from the open brow, the eyes and mouth of very ordinary colour and dimensions, but the one clear and true, the other curving quickly to mirth or tenderness. Perhaps he was drawing the contrast, and beginning to realize that a good and gracious woman need not be a hothouse plant after all.

On the other hand, the girl was making her own notes as she looked at the grave scholar's face, with its unmistakable look of thought and culture, at the sensitive mouth and abstracted but kindly eyes.

"A right good fellow; he only needs a little waking up," was her inward comment, and doubtless she decided that the task could not be begun too soon, for by-and-by Mrs. Tregarthen had the satisfaction of seeing Mr. Austin saunter past, still oblivious of that empty chair, in very animated talk with "that objectionable young woman."

"Entrapped at once. How can men be such fools?" exclaimed the worthy lady in the bitterness of her heart. To her it henceforth became a *plain duty* to keep Mr. Austin, if possible, from going further astray. He soon found, rather to his surprise, how much of his time was taken up by endless discussions about he hardly knew what. Expeditions, which he thought it discourteous to decline, were continually being got up, when the elder Miss Tregarthen, with a green vasculum slung over her thin shoulders, and a butterfly net in one hand, balancing the alpenstock in the other, would amble by his side and entertain him with reminiscences of the dear parish at home. But a long-limbed man of thirty-eight cannot be wholly kept in afternoon tea-table durance, unless he is specially interested in the tea-maker, and of this there was, alas, no sign. After the lapse of more than a fortnight, Mr. Austin seemed wholly unaware whether it was Laura or Louisa who handed him his cup, and was so gently assiduous as to his comfort.

On the other hand, in spite of Mrs. Tregarthen's vigilance, he

showed dangerous symptoms of succumbing to the arts and practices of "that Miss Carew," as the solitary young lady had come to be known. The duration of her stay had now elevated her to a seat above the bignonia, much to Mrs. Tregarthen's indignation, who thought the manager lamentably wanting in tact in not discriminating between those who might be admitted to that charmed circle and those who ought to be regarded as intruders. Even the most absent-minded man will ere long gain some comprehension of new conditions, and when Austin had observed how fluctuating the population of the Hôtel des Bains was, he began half consciously to dread, as Mrs. Tregarthen devoutly hoped, that the next day would see Miss Carew's place empty. But day passed after day and still she was there, till Mrs. Tregarthen began to wonder more and more pointedly what could keep any one in Funkelbad who was not taking the baths, to all which Miss Carew would listen placidly, but with that slight compression of the red mouth which Austin was becoming quick to notice. That first talk on the terrace had by no means been their last. Miss Carew, it seemed, knew Oxford well, and that revived Austin's memories of old days and old friends, while the society of a woman who had apparently read a good deal, and could not only talk but, strange to say, think, was gradually arousing the solitary student to the knowledge that there were more worlds than the one in which he had so long dwelt alone. But of that society it seemed to him that he got tantalizingly little. Miss Carew had apparently her own occupations, as to which she was reticent; that she took long walks he knew, but he had never had the luck to encounter her.

At last, one day, when for the twentieth time he had scaled the pass and looked down on the green floor of the valley, with the toy trees and houses set here and there upon it, a sudden rain-storm drove him into the little inn on the verge of the precipice. Here, in the bare guest-room, at a sputtering new-lit fire of wood, he found Miss Carew seated.

"What would Mrs. Tregarthen say?" she asked demurely, when Austin, having drawn a chair close up to hers, expressed his pleasure at having for once encountered her.

The rain was beating hard on the window panes and the mist whirling denser and denser. The fire was blazing up cheerily, and if Austin, after a glance at the fair, flushed face, did not ex-

actly say that Mrs. Tregarthen might go to the deuce, he expressed something very like that in sentiment, though couched in more clerical language.

"Oh, I know that I am her *bête noire*. It was quite bad enough that I should come here alone, but that I should *stay* here has filled up the cup of my iniquity to the brim; here, where unless one is taking the baths, there is really no occupation for a cultivated mind"—mimicking Mrs. Tregarthen's frigid little voice. "I think that I would agree with her to some extent, but though I am not taking the baths, thank heaven, my poor old nurse is, and I have to sit a good deal with her to lighten her penance."

"Your old nurse," echoed Austin in considerable astonishment.

"Yes, is it not funny to think that if I had put her name down in the hotel list I should have seemed a person of perfect respectability, even to Mrs. Tregarthen? Why didn't I?—I see you are asking mentally. You are quite at liberty to say it out. Simply because I am so used to living alone, it did not occur to me; and then it amused me to see the British She Philistine on the defensive, or the offensive perhaps I should say, and I did not see that I owed *her* any explanation. Poor Bennett has been father and mother, and sister and cousin and aunt, so I thought it the least thing I could do, when the baths here were recommended for her, to bring her and try the effect, and she is improving wonderfully, I am glad to say."

"Oh, she is improving?" Austin's tone could hardly have been more lugubrious had the good lady been dying.

"Yes, wonderfully, so much so that we think of leaving almost immediately. Joy seldom kills, we are told, but break the news gently to Mrs. Tregarthen."

"You are leaving?"

"Yes, in a day or so. Bennett is better, and ——" after a little pause, and with a gleam of mischief in the brown eyes, "I have got all my notes worked up."

"Your notes?"

"Mr. Austin, the weather is surely affecting your conversational powers. When I was a child it was instilled into me, as one of the first rules of politeness, that I must not repeat what any one said to me. The notes of my lectures I mean, if you care to know." There was a little flush on the fresh face, and if Austin had been looking at her instead of staring into the fire, he

would have noticed that now familiar compression of the lips. Something in her whole manner suggested that she was watching an experiment, as to the result of which she was somewhat anxious.

"Ah, you have been attending lectures then. I suppose a great many young ladies do so now-a-days. The last week or two have made me realize how much behind the world I have got," said Austin rather dreamily, poking absently at the burfing wood.

"Yes, I have been attending a good many lectures—the lecturer as a rule has to be present,"—dryly. The clergyman turned with a start and stared at her.

"You think I take a pleasure in shocking people, perhaps; that it was Mrs. Tregarthen's turn first, and that now it is yours," a little defiantly.

"No, indeed, I—I am very much interested," stammered Austin. "Why should I be shocked?"

Miss Carew looked unconvinced, but she went on: "I do not know why, I am sure, but I find people often are, so I thought I would like you to know the worst of me, as some would think it. When I began to think about my future at all, I found I would either have to be a hanger-on on my relatives, such as they are, or do something for myself; so as I had money enough to take me through Newnham and Cambridge I went in for that. Of course, everybody shook their heads over my imprudence. I need not come to them when I had thrown away my all, and so on. I would not have done that, no, not though I had starved," clenching one firm hand, "but mercifully I never needed. I was lucky in getting this lectureship at Somerville Hall, and have as many students as I can take, and," with a bright little nod, "can not only keep myself but Bennett too; so, surely that is better than dusting my cousins' drawing-rooms or darning their stockings on sufferance." Then after a pause and with a sudden change of voice, "Really I feel I should apologize for thrusting my autobiography on you in this fashion; I don't know why I did it, though reminiscences are the fashion of the day. I think the rain is over now," jumping up and going across to the window.

Austin had forgotten, as he often did, that some sort of reply or comment was expected from him. At first, he had been too

much occupied in re-adjusting his ideas. His conception of the Emancipated Woman was an angular, elderly female, blue-spectacled, slovenly of dress, strident of voice, the accepted caricature, which like the French presentment of the "Mees Anglaise," no amount of contrary proof can apparently discredit. Now, here was this fresh-faced cheery girl, whose boyish frankness of look and tone increased perhaps her appearance of youth, telling him calmly that she was a Newnham scholar, a Cambridge graduate, an Oxford lecturer. Like the Queen of Sheba there was no more strength left in him. As he sat gazing at this new phenomenon, his thoughts grew more wistful; how bright, how independent, how fearless she was! She had lived her life, while he had been mooning his away. How little she needed anything that any one, he least of all, could give her—quite oblivious of the true state of the case, that his phenomenon was all the time most womanishly longing for some word of encouragement upon her confession, and not having the key to his brooding silence, could only set it down to deep disapproval.

Next morning, it was with a start of dismay that, looking across the breakfast-table, he saw that Miss Carew's place was empty.

"Oh, she is still here; she has only gone for a walk, I believe, or to look after that mysterious old woman whom it seems she has taken under her special patronage. Some people say she brought her with her, but if so, her name would have been on the hotel books. Even any one so cool as that Miss Carew requires some sort of a cloak for their doings. I daresay this old person's case will require another week's treatment. I should think there is not the slightest fear of Miss Carew leaving before the end of the month," uttered Mrs. Tregarthen in a voice like a biting acid.

"Dear me, I shall be leaving then too, just another week here," said the clergyman half to himself; nor did it occur to him at the moment to connect his neighbour's sudden spiteful jerk of laughter with his innocent speech.

"Only a week, only a week," the stream rushing down by his side seemed to echo, as having sauntered out, he turned up a narrow lateral valley leading up to a *col*, over which the track led to a waste of glacier and snow.

Yes, only a week, and there would be his old housekeeper, and Silcote rectory and his study again, and the silent rows of books—

all would be the same. Well, why should he want a change? had he not longed many a time for that quiet retreat, since he had left it, and for the company of his silent friends? Yes, but he knew now that he wanted more, and that the life he had led in that dim room would never satisfy him now. Why not put it in plain words? He wanted Madge Carew, longed for that bright face, and for those true brave eyes to lighten up his old home, and to help him to a stronger purpose and some better use of his life. Yes, he wanted her; but how could he ask her to give up her full independent life, her freedom, the career she had chosen, for his out-of-the-world parish and dull rectory? What had he to recommend him in her eyes—a man old before his time.

At this moment, the increasing roughness of the path brought him back to the present, and glancing upwards he saw, far up on the *col* above him, the figure of a boy outlined against the sky. As he looked, the lad turned and began the descent. Austin, in his strong manhood, looked with something like envy at that distant figure, light and agile, bounding downwards, as if walking were too slow for such young abundant vitality. Oh, for his own lost youth, he thought, falling back into his old musings again as he plodded upwards.

He had just topped the steep slope which had hidden the lad from his sight, when a faint startled cry made him look round. To his amazement, he saw a few paces off Miss Carew sitting in a heap on the wayside, half in and half out of a sort of ditch or cutting that ran alongside of the path.

"Miss Carew, what has happened? Have you fallen, have you hurt yourself? Have you sprained your ankle? Let me help you. Do you think you could try to move if I were to support you." By this time he was stooping over her, his face a picture of alarm and distress. "For Heaven's sake, only speak to me, Miss Carew; what is it!"

But this apparently was precisely what the girl could not or would not do. She waved him peremptorily away, and after one quick glance, buried her face again in her pocket-handkerchief. The dimensions of a modern handkerchief prevent it, however, from being much of a screen, and Mr. Austin had a full view of a scarlet cheek, and presently that brave colour dyed her ear and the line of neck visible between the brown coils of hair and the stiff white collar. He stared in dire perplexity. The girl's

whole figure was shaking with some emotion ; was it sobs or laughter ? On the face of it, there did not seem to be any special reason—in that high empty valley where he and she seemed to be the only living creatures—for immoderate laughter, and yet she did not appear exactly to be crying. *He and she !*

"Hullo," he exclaimed, "where is that boy I saw coming down from the *col* a little while ago ? He must have come this way," looking round. "He might run for help, there are some *châlets* not half a mile off." Then another thought striking him : "Miss Carew, it isn't possible that he was rude to you, that he ventured—that——"

Miss Carew's emotion, of whatever kind, was redoubled.

"No—no—no !" she ejaculated, the last word ending in a sort of strangled crow. Mr. Austin had heard vaguely of a certain mysterious feminine ailment known as hysterics, in which the victim laughs, cries, shrieks and sobs alternately. Clearly, Miss Carew must be hysterical. What was to be done in such an extremity ? Had he not heard something of burnt feathers, smelling salts, slapping of hands, or was that for fainting ? Perhaps it was with a view to trying the last remedy, since the others, whether suitable or not, were certainly unavailable, that he managed somehow to get hold of one of her hands. If he had meant to slap it, he must have forgotten his intention, for he only held it very gently.

"Miss Carew, tell me, are you hurt ?"

"No"—sob—"yes, I mean—not much."

"Do you think you could rise if I were to help you ?"

"No, no, I can't," chokingly.

"Could you not even move a little, so that we might find out if you are much hurt ? You are in a very uncomfortable position. I am sure your feet must be getting very wet. Come," encouragingly.

"No, no, I can't move, I won't move, don't ask me. I am not hurt, at least not much ; I don't need anything. Please go away ; I know I would be better if I were alone. Do go away, *please*," entreatingly.

Mr. Austin loosed her hand. "Pardon me," he said rather coldly, "I had no intention of being intrusive." He walked irresolutely a few paces off, and stood still. He looked up to the *col*, over which grey cloud-heads were lifting themselves, bring-

ing with them a bleak wind that came shrilling down the marshy, boulder-strewn slope. He took another step, paused again, looked back at the girl's crouched-up figure, and then a stride or two brought him back to her side.

"I can't leave you here in this desolate place, and with a storm coming. You are asking too much," he said almost violently. "How can you expect any man to do such a thing? I do not know how to help you, since you will not tell me what is wrong, but surely there must be something I could do."

Silence, while the wind rose and fell in a long *eerie* wail.

"Miss Carew," said Austin, at his wit's end, "if you were like other girls I would simply *make* you get up——"

"*You* would make me get up!" flashing out in sudden mutiny from behind the handkerchief.

"Yes, I would," steadily; "but you are not like other girls."

"Thank you," hysterically.

"So I can only suppose that you have some special reason for what you are doing. If you will tell me plainly and truly that you need nothing and wish for nothing from me, that you only want to be left alone; if you will look at me and tell me that, I shall understand that my insistence is mere intrusion, and I will leave you at once, though," his voice suddenly quivering from its stern tone, "it will be an agony of anxiety for me till I know that you are safe."

A pause.

"Look at me, Miss Carew, and tell me what I am to do."

Like some creature at bay, the girl flung back her head. Face and neck were one blush; anger, vexation, shame were all struggling with a rueful, uncontrollable laughter.

She faced Austin for a moment, their eyes met, her lips shaped the word "go," then her eyes slowly fell before his.

In those deep-set kindly eyes looking into hers, she read something that she had not seen or had refused to see before. If only they had looked at her so yesterday, the world would have been changed, but now—now—it was too grotesque. Oh, it was cruel, it was too bitter; what might have been was hopelessly impossible either way now. If she bade him go he would take but one meaning from her command and would leave her at once and for ever.

If she told him—but how, how could she? Yes, in a sort of

desperation she *would* tell him. It would speedily cure him of any lingering feeling for her, the only thing she could do for him now. He would have his merciful escape and his old ideal to console him in his loneliness—trying miserably to jeer.

"If you must know, you *shall* know! There was no boy here—it was I."

"You!" bewildered.

"Yes, I! Oh, *can't* you understand, or do you wish to compel me to say it out? Very well then I cannot rise—I cannot move while you are here, because—I *have no skirt!*"

Austin collapsed on the nearest boulder and stared at her. If she had been hysterical before, this must be sheer lunacy.

"Is not that plain enough, or do you want to hear more?" she went on in a rage of vexation. "I have left my skirt at that last chalet. I often do so when I am going a long lonely walk, and you don't know what a blessed ease it is, or what you condemn women to when you make them walk uphill inside of a sack. I felt as if I had wings as I came down the hill just now. I am not a bit ashamed of what I have done, not the least bit," defiantly, "why should I? I would walk straight into the hotel and be rather pleased if I met Mrs. Tregarthen, but when I saw *you—you*—I know you don't approve of me, I saw that yesterday—and, and now to-day"—getting incoherent—"I don't care what silly, narrow-minded people think of me—but, but you are different—you will be *hurt—horried*" (gasp). "I remember what you said that first night—and—and when it is some one I—care for—*esteem*, I mean," hastily substituting the cooler word. Then in a sudden accent of distress, "Oh, go away—go away—surely you will go away now. I know you must think it serves me right, and that it is frightfully funny, but don't, please don't laugh at me till you are out of sight. I—I can't help laughing myself." And the Oxford lecturer crammed her handkerchief into her mouth, in the effort to stifle what may have been laughter, since she said it was so.

Even in his unregenerate state of a few weeks ago on the great woman question, Austin would have been far too generous to triumph over this luckless champion of freedom of limb, as well as of work and life, whom only a too fitting Nemesis had overtaken. The sudden shock of Miss Carew's sufficiently startling announcement might well have thrown him back upon his old

ideal. Perhaps for a moment he tried to take refuge in it, and be as horrified as doubtless he ought to have been, but what was that fading abstraction compared to this girl, "ripe and real," before him? In ordinary conventional circumstances he might never have summoned up courage to address the Miss Carew of every day—bright, resolute, independent—but that sudden quiver in the defiant voice, the quick-coming tears in the brown eyes, were too much for him. What had she nearly said?

"Is that all—is it only esteem? Cannot you go a little further, Miss Carew—Madge? I know I have not much to offer you, and I am asking you to give up a great deal. I did not mean to speak to you, for I thought it was so hopeless, but if you care at all about me—if you don't wish to hurt me as you say—to hurt me for all my life, you will——"

Apparently Miss Carew had no wish to hurt him, for the sentence ended abruptly in a silence that was apparently satisfactory to both concerned. For sheer reckless daring, no one can equal a shy man when once he is fairly roused out of himself, and Austin would doubtless have marvelled at his own audacity if he had had time to think of it.

"Stop," said Miss Carew, after a few moments. "Are you quite sure that you realize what you are doing, that you are proposing to marry a girl who travels alone?"

"Who will never need to do so again unless she likes."

"A woman who lectures!"

"Willingly, so long as she will promise to keep her lectures for me," with the joyful rashness of a newly-accepted lover.

"That you will have a—a"—between sudden tears and laughter—"a wife who wears the Bre—ee——"

But that sentence was never finished, why, it need hardly be chronicled.

An Afternoon's Folly.

By the Author of "ADONAI, Q.C.," "YVONNE," "MONSIEUR," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE bazaar was very quiet in the meantime. It was not a large bazaar, but St. Jerome's Mission, in aid of which it was taking place, lies in one of the poorest districts in London, and every one's interest just then was much centred in poor districts ; so the stalls were held by wealthy people, and were exceptionally handsome. In the morning there had been quite a crush of the fashionable world, early November though it was, but this afternoon there had suddenly sprung up a gloom in the heavens, undeniably foreboding something, though, perhaps, only snow, and, whether from that cause or not, the bazaar had become most dishearteningly quiet.

At a stall just opposite the gorgeously-draped doorway, a tall and very erect young lady had stood for some little time alone. She could hardly have been termed a pretty girl, and yet hers was just the sort of face, with its large, cool, somewhat callous golden-brown eyes, its mouth large too, at once sweet and resolute, perfectly certain to stamp its image on the hearts of some, probably for ever, as the most beautiful in all the world. No one could have denied the handsomeness of her figure, nor the loveliness of her exceptionally sunny hair. The stall was hung with silk of Liberty's most grateful tints ; and everything on it, from the massive screens at the back to the smallest of the costly nothings in the foreground, was more or less artistic in form and colour. It all accorded well with the girl's striking fairness and her deep brown velvet dress.

Suddenly a change flashed into her expression, instantaneously leaving it exactly as before, cool and indifferent. A man had come through the doorway and was strolling leisurely towards the hall. Strictly speaking, he was not handsome,

but yet his face, too, was a remarkable one ; the forehead broad, the chin long and firm, the eyes so fascinatingly blue and laughter-loving as to centre the attention of an observer on them alone. The girl had been lazily scrutinizing the arrangement of the sage-green curtain over the doorway when he entered, and continued to do so still.

He came up and called her by name, and shook hands, smiling gaily.

"How do you do, Cousin Adrienna? I was so dreadfully vexed I could not go to the concert yesterday afternoon, for which your mother so kindly sent me a ticket,—I broke a dozen business engagements in the most reckless fashion to be early here to-day. As I wrote to you I was at the theatre nearly all yesterday, busy rehearsing that new play shortly to appear, so that to follow my own inclinations and go to the concert was a sheer impossibility. I hope my aunt was not disappointed. Oh, what a lovely gown that is you are wearing."

He had been holding her hand still,—so soft and fragile it felt in his strong brown one ; but now, as he swept his bright eyes rapidly down over the mellow-tinted dress, the girl started and pulled it almost roughly away.

He turned and bent over the stall to hide the vexed flush that rose to his face at her startled movement, heaving an audible sigh, however, the corners of his mouth drooping in a somewhat comical expression, his attitude that of a man who was sorry he should always be doing the wrong thing, and who would fain say something sarcastic at his own expense.

"And how goes business, Miss Adrienna?"

"Fairly well. There was quite a crowd in the morning, and we expect a lot of people by-and-bye. I am sorry, Cyril, I cannot let you know the precise nature of my mother's feelings as regards your non-appearance at the concert yesterday afternoon. For one thing, some very particular friends of ours were with us ; so she unfortunately did not give expression to them in words at all. But, admitting and making due allowance for the bitterness of her disappointment, it seems a pity you should have troubled yourself over a matter so ephemeral, or should have put yourself about to do us the honour of coming here to-day. For my part, I would not interfere with any of your—your—well, business engagements for the world."

He loved this girl, and, as he leisurely examined an embroidered pin-cushion, from which Eastern spices scented the air, bit his lip to repress a smile. He was certainly not conscious of having done anything to deserve this, but he was proud of her ever-ready speech.

"Adrienna, I shall inaugurate my afternoon's folly by the purchase of this cushion. Yes, I was very sorry I could not join you yesterday. Bradmore, who used to be a companion of mine in the old days when I played at the Butterfly—Bradmore told me how well that new pianist was received; told me, too, that you were there. Poor Bradmore, dear old boy! You did not notice him, I suppose? But it is not likely you know him."

"No, not at all likely; except, perhaps, by sight."

He slowly raised himself from his stooping posture and looked round at her, a good deal less laughter in his eyes than before. She had just put the change for the pin-cushion into his hand.

"Fifteen and sixpence—let me see. Yes, that is all right," communed she with herself, her sweet mouth, her grave, pale brows, under an airy tress or two of gold, bent meditatively over a bag. She shut it, and cast a glance of well-bred surprise at his rigidly outstretched hand with the money in it.

"I trust there is nothing wrong with your change," said she politely.

He put it quickly into his pocket without answering, and again stood upright beside her, looking along the gay hall. If she had meant to wound him she might congratulate herself on having succeeded. A dreamy, very pathetic look flashed into those clear blue eyes of his and lingered there. There had been a summer month, not so very long ago, spent with Adrienna at an old grey country house, where the birds were calling all day long from rivulet to breezy hill, from copse to thicket, over a wilderness of tall pink standard roses; a month of paradise, when he had hoped—when he had thought—Ah! With a shiver and a little sigh, he recalled himself to the present.

"Well, and how did your mother's dinner party go off last night? I thought once of looking in on my way home from the theatre, although I am aware it isn't just the usual hour for calling. Who was there, by the way?"

She broke into a laugh at once, and when she laughed every

atom of her somewhat rigid dignity left her. Yet she seemed to-day to wish to maintain it.

"Well, there was the Bishop of Dobham, Cyril, and the bishop's wife, and the commissioner from Dangipore, whom mother wanted to be so particularly kind to, on account of Ned. But then it transpired somehow that the bishop and the commissioner were not on speaking terms, and the commissioner's wife—a tearful, short-sighted little woman—mistook Captain Grant for Canon FitzGerald, and began to tell him all about the cause of the quarrel in a corner of the drawing-room—and I suppose you know what Charlie Grant is! Then, during the course of the evening, mother got exchanging confidences with old Lord Fairbanks, and told him in a half-whisper—forgetting how deaf he is—that quite too terrible anecdote just going the rounds about young Mrs. Vavasour and the oysters. What *should* the dreadful old man do but understand her to talk of Admiral Vavasour, and he burst into a roar of laughter, and began shouting out to Admiral Vavasour about it across the room and telling some unintelligible story of a man who ate two hundred. 'But I suppose that is nothing to what you can do,' roared he. Oh! and the admiral, you know, so fearfully sensitive about his appetite. Poor mother went to bed quite hysterical." She abruptly paused and, drawing breath, went on in quite a different tone, "As for me—well, we happened to meet Sir Sidney Speelan, who has just come home from abroad, at the concert yesterday, and asked him to look in during the evening. So I had the unspeakable consolation of his society. I enjoy talking to him immensely; he seems to know literally everything."

The young man had stood listening, with a slight smile, now and again laughing a little, but with a shade of stiffness in his attitude throughout. The Wyatts, to which family, in different branches, Adrienna and he belonged, owed their importance to riches alone; and they had not always been so rich as they now were. This list of those at the dinner party jarred on him; and most unreasonably so, since he had asked for it. Suddenly, at her last words, a total change came into his expression.

There was a pause, the bazaar was filling up again, the stallholders beginning to return in laughing parties from the refreshment room.

"Oh, I am so glad I did not happen to call," he said at last

very quietly. "It would, of course, have been a pity that my presence should contaminate an atmosphere inhaled by a galaxy of such distinction. Pray, how would it be to engage me for recitation purposes, Adrienna, when you give your next dinner? I daresay I might pick out a line here and there in Shakespeare which would not offend the irascible bishop, and of course I should not expect to be asked to dine. As for Sir Sidney Speelan—and I thought you understood so much—I decline positively to discuss him, his cosmopolitan knowledge, or anything else regarding him, with you."

The girl's lips had parted, as if about to burst forth into bitter remonstrance; but now she started, and turned rapidly away to another end of the stall, where she began hastily to remove something from beneath a pile of cloaks. Somewhat abashed, perhaps, he went, half-reluctantly, a step or two nearer, and as he saw her there before him in her fairness his face flushed a dusky red and the angry sparkle in his eyes became clouded in mist.

He bent forward and spoke in a low moved tone:

"There! I have worked myself into a temper, dear. I beg your pardon, Adrienna. I have loved you so fondly, cherished such a strong, and I suppose foolish, hope you would one day be my wife, that I—that you must forgive my sensitiveness. Adrienna, you are always cold, but to-day you are angry with me. Is it that my non-appearance yesterday vexes you? I assure you—I swear to you I could not help myself. And if it is not that, *what* is it?"

The first melodious notes of a waltz prelude were stealing across from the band platform as she stood beside him, passing in hurried review the rustling pages of a little pink raffle-book. She shut it with decision, and again raising her head, looked coolly straight past his passion and pain-driven countenance—the pent-up secret of years there written in it—and sent a beaming smile over his shoulder to some one advancing up the hall.

"Should you mind letting me pass, Cyril?" said she, quite kindly and indifferently, as though, too, she had come to the conclusion it was little use taking offence at anything *he* said or did. "Thanks. Sir Sidney Speelan promised to help me with this raffle, and here he is. Well, Sir Sidney, at last."

Whatsoever he felt, this time at least, there was no external sign of emotion. He stooped rather unnecessarily low and long over a beautiful Indian bracelet exposed to view just here ; but then he had taken such a fancy to a mere pin-cushion. At length he moved and sauntered lazily past where Adrienna was talking with much animation to a dark and cynical-looking man, listening to her with an attention almost too profound to be real.

"Wyatt, we may count on your aid, of course," Sir Sidney cried, with a curious and not very pleasant flash of his dark eyes.

"Booked for another stall," he answered shortly.

CHAPTER II.

It was an audacious falsehood, inspired by the exigencies of the moment, and of which, the next minute, he felt honestly ashamed. He was not on intimate terms with many of the stall-holders, but knew the vicar's people rather well ; and curiously enough found himself, as if by instinct, bearing straight down on their stall. He remembered uncomfortably that he had a particular aversion to the whole household, with the exception of the two youngest children and their remarkably pretty and modest little governess. Well, this was lucky, so far. Mrs. and the Misses Brown were so much absorbed over a wealthy customer that he might possibly reach the sweetmeat tent, before which the children were standing, and fix himself as an assistant there. "Are you going inside the tent?" whispered one of the children to him. The children and their governess were alike timid and put upon by every one else in the household. "Yes," said he. He had caught sight of a small blushing face in the shadow.

He entered, and as he met the eyes raised to him his own flashed in sudden and somewhat embarrassed recollection. This little governess, only eighteen, very badly educated, rather stupid, and very, very sweet, loved him. He had found it out the last time he met her with Adrienna, who had taken a fancy to the girl.

"Well, I have come to help you," he said as they shook hands. She was at a little table wrapping up parcels of toffee. He did not look at her directly again, but *did* lower his voice, in the way a man will (with the best intentions of showing his

indifference) when he has divined a woman's secret, and happens to be alone with her. "I shall not bore you?"

"Oh, Mr. Wyatt!"

"What, not although I spend the whole afternoon with you?"

"Oh, Mr. Wyatt!"

She had the most winsome little face imaginable. In any one else such intense embarrassment must have looked awkward, but there could not have been a prettier picture than her half-averted head and graceful figure just now combined to present. The fragile taper fingers were trembling so violently in this sudden and totally unexpected rapture, a situation doubtless the subject of her wildest dreams, perhaps, poor little thing, of her prayers, for long. Of course, she had no doubt fancied he had shown signs of caring for her; and now—what could she think? He had come straight over to her stall. She had no sort of penetration, and was utterly unsuspecting of his love for Adrienna.

"Well, there goes the band in earnest now, so we shall not have much opportunity for conversation," he said a little grimly, in a more matter-of-fact tone, and set to work forthwith at the toffee. The tent was illuminated by a single Chinese lantern, and as he looked down at her, in her shabby but dainty best, a white frill, a white marguerite, a neat though somewhat worn black silk, he noted the girlish care with which she had striven to make the best to-day of her always lovely little self, and felt impatient with the unkindness that had shut her away in here: "Like a desert flower, you know—what is it the poet says?" he remarked, putting his thoughts right into words, hardly knowing what he said, a sob in his throat—not for her—as a little ring of callous laughter penetrated to them. "I shan't tell any one that you are here, shall I?" whispered Daisy Brown again, her head coming cautiously through the aperture. "Don't, there's a good child," he answered promptly; "and close the doorway if you can. You shall have a new doll." A feverish inclination to laugh at the very unexpectedness of the situation came upon him. Whoever else he did or did not understand, he understood this little Amy Hamilton, and the interpretation she was just now putting on his behaviour. Well——

But now, in this roseate gloom—the quivering pink light shed but a faint radiance—he began, with gravely set features, to think

intently. Adrienna had begun this afternoon by being cold, but for that he freely forgave her—not so for the invitation given yesterday afternoon to Sir Sidney Speelan—and certainly not so—it was altogether too horrible—for the public manner in which she was appearing with him to-day. Before going abroad some few months since, Sir Sidney, taking advantage perhaps of Adrienna's fatherless condition, had amused himself, *dared* to amuse himself, by dancing attendance on her—when it suited him. Cyril had thought it his duty then, even as a near relative, to say what he knew as to the man's character. Adrienna had not received the news with the best grace possible, and in consequence there had sprung up a certain coldness betwixt them. But still that had not prevented his insisting on her listening to him, and in the end she had seemed fully convinced. He had not heard of Sir Sidney's return, but no doubt Adrienna had, he thought with a flash of wrath and jealousy ; and, good heavens ! he had just witnessed with his own eyes her greeting to this man, in a public hall. No, think over the whole matter dispassionately as he might, he could find no excuse, no shadow of an excuse, for Adrienna. Time passed on, the band now sighing through dreamy waltz, now, with blare of trumpets and torrent of sound, bursting into inspiring opera. Cyril must have wrapped up hundreds of toffee parcels, there could be no harder worker in the bazaar. Ah ! those sunny summer hours spent with Adrienna. He seemed to listen once more to the monotonous babble of a river ; to feel the soft caress of scented breezes, to see the golden gleam of Adrienna's hair, as they sauntered to and fro amidst the tall pink standard roses.

The little governess had expanded into something utterly unlike her usual self, whispering soft ejaculations over the toffee, murmuring snatches of song. The whole aspect of life had changed for her.

"Did you enjoy yourself yesterday afternoon, Mr. Wyatt ?" she inquired when he reproached her with not talking to him ; a reproach called forth by his feeling of intense irritation that she could be so ridiculous.

"Not particularly. What makes you ask me such a question, my dear"—he was about to stop there, carelessly, recklessly—Adrienna, he knew was approaching, but recollecting himself, added, "my dear Miss Hamilton ?"

"I—I—oh well, Billy and Daisy and I recognized you on a four-in-hand yesterday afternoon. Then it came up, that is, we turned, and saw it again. We asked a policeman whose four-in-hand it was, and he said it was Lord Hadley's ; so—so I thought you must have enjoyed yourself."

He kept his eyes fastened on her almost pityingly. Poor, foolish little thing, with her brilliant blushes and this new unboundedly happy and somewhat shallow vivacity. How could she be so blind as to mistake his feverish conduct this afternoon, for love?

"You were mistaken," he said, with a sigh, but very gently ; "I was at the theatre nearly the whole of yesterday ; and besides, I do not know Lord Hadley, except perhaps by sight," he abruptly ended with a bitter smile.

Steps, a clear decided voice, and the soft brush past of a velvet gown.

"Ah, here are the roses, Sir Sidney. Yes, of course you are to choose for me. The dance is at Wycherley Park, did I tell you? Well, no, *no*—not those horrid pink standard roses, I have always hated them. Oh yes, the white will do."

"And what about the *quid pro quo*?"

"What? Oh, I see. Well, you shall have one for yourself."

"To cherish eternally."

"You mean until it fades."

"You are ungenerous, unless the arrangement includes your own beautiful self."

The voices had passed.

"That was Miss Adrienna Wyatt," remarked the little governess placidly. She got no answer, and thinking he had not heard her: "That was Miss Adrienna Wyatt," she began again. Suddenly she gasped, the words dying on her lips. She was stupid, certainly, but not so stupid that she could not comprehend the exclamation that had escaped Cyril Wyatt's lips, nor the meaning of the awful look on his face just now. Heaven knew which feeling, what feeling was strongest in the man this first moment. Pink standard roses ; she had always hated them.

He started up, pushed back the door of the tent roughly, and suddenly remembering the girl beside him, turned to her. There she sat, stricken, tears in her large soft eyes, the hope, the bright-

ness, it seemed even the youth, gone from her face. In the midst of his anger and pain he paused, horrified.

"My poor child, my—my darling," he stammered, "you are wrong; at least all that is over now, and I will come back to you." The next minute, only half realizing what he had said, not at all knowing what he had meant, he was at the other side of the hall. Sir Sidney Speelan had disappeared, and he did not see the flowers, but Adrienna was there.

"Adrienna."

"Well?"

"Do you propose to wear the flowers you have just bought with Sir Sidney Speelan, after the words and tone I heard him use to you?"

She was perfectly cool, but he was so unmistakably hardly able to control his fury it was no wonder she had grown pale.

"After the words, whatever they were, which you—overheard, yes."

He looked her straight in the face with burning eyes.

"*Then I have done with you,*" he said hoarsely, and went straight out of the hall.

* * * * *

About an hour later, his air that of a man with a set purpose, he re-entered it. To-morrow, who could say what his feelings towards Adrienna might be? different theorists regarding love would predict differently; but just now, at all events, this passion of a lifetime seemed to him a thing of the dead past, driven straight out of his heart at one blow by Adrienna's unworthiness. It was the sudden thought that for the family's sake, his own sake, she ought not to be allowed to wear those flowers, which made him deliberately retrace his steps.

"Cyril, I should like you to deliver this letter for me." He turned swiftly to face her, the icy atmosphere of the November afternoon clinging all about his person, and was verily startled out of his anger; she was so entirely changed in manner, in her whole appearance, so crushed and weary. "I do not wish it delivered until to-morrow evening," she went on hastily, "and meantime, I know I can trust you, you must not throw so much as a careless glance at the address. I—I shall not have an opportunity of delivering this letter to-morrow myself."

He had not so much as a shadow of doubt in his mind as to where the letter was going.

"I will *post* it for you to-morrow, since that is your wish," he said in a low stern tone; "but only if you can give me your assurance that you write in reply to a direct proposal of marriage."

"I—I may say that I do," she murmured faintly.

He bowed and put it into his pocket.

"I congratulate you—you both, sincerely, *mutually*," he said with a sneer. Over there the grateful tints of the Liberty drapings still pleased the eye; and as he put the letter into his pocket it rubbed against the pin-cushion which he had bought with that laughing remark as to inaugurating his afternoon's folly. The words flashed to his recollection with indescribable bitterness.

What was this! Little Daisy Brown had pulled him shyly by the sleeve, and now was pouring forth some long, confused story, weeping bitterly the while. There had been a "row"—an awful row. Jane had overheard his last words to Miss Hamilton, and Jane had told Ann, and Ann had told mother. It had all come out—that Miss Hamilton and he had been so long together in the tent; and mother had turned Miss Hamilton away. Miss Hamilton had nowhere, nowhere to go.

He listened, first with a flush of shame that he could so completely have forgotten her; then, with strangely set features:

"You are sure of what you are telling me, dear," he said to the sobbing child.

"Quite sure; mother first said she must go to-morrow; but now she is going to-night."

He took just one long moment to think; then, drawing a deep breath, walked straight past them all into the tent, in the depths of which a poor terrified little figure cowered, and putting his arms gently about the girl, asked her to be his wife.

* * * * *

To-morrow night had come; the first night of the new play at the theatre, where Cyril Wyatt was *jeune premier*. He stood ready in his courtier's dress of glistening satin, a pale but decided blue, the precise blue of his eyes, which flashed and scintillated to-night with even more than their usual brilliancy. His clever clear-cut face had never worn a look more resolute; his well-knit

figure, the wide lace collar falling open around his handsome neck, never shown to more advantage. True it would not contribute to the success of the play if he were so grave by-and-by on the stage, as just now here in his dressing-room ; but still his deep gravity seemed to suit the costume.

He had been for some few minutes quite alone. At the back of the dressing-table lay his pocket-book, and now he lifted this to put it in a place of greater safety. As he did so a letter slipped out and fell to the floor, where it lay address upwards. He flushed and stared strangely, an astonished and pained look on his face. This was the letter which Adrienna had entrusted to him, and which he had intended posting on his way home from the theatre ; but—*but* the letter was addressed to himself.

With what seemed rather unnecessary deliberation he picked it up and opened it.

"CYRIL,—I have made a mistake. We happened to meet the Brown children and Amy Hamilton as we went into the concert room yesterday, and they assured us they had seen you a few minutes before on Lord Hadley's four-in-hand. Of course, I considered my mother and myself insulted by what I deemed your false excuses to us ; but, Cyril, I have just found out that you were certainly not there. I am writing this behind the stall to ask you to pardon me and all my foolish conduct this afternoon—of which this mistake is the sole explanation. I *meant* you to hear what passed betwixt Sir Sidney Speelan and me. I was so angry and miserable I think I was hardly responsible for what I was doing. I flung the roses into the waste-paper basket directly afterwards—of course ; and I shall never speak to Sir Sidney Speelan again. You accused me of being cold. Ah, Cyril, that was because I was never fully persuaded you loved me—until now.

"Cyril, something tells me this afternoon's folly has parted us for ever. It is for this reason that I do not wish you to read my letter until to-morrow night, when, as you may remember, we shall be on our way southwards, not to return for some little time. What is done, is done, and we must bear it. Heaven help me at least, Cyril ; Heaven alone knows how passionately I have loved you—my dearest.

ADRIENNA."

He stood there, every feature of his blanched face quivering convulsively ; the letter trembling in his hands. Oh, the miserable confusion, the folly of it all. And he had taken the irrevocable step, with this very letter in his pocket.

He calmed himself with an effort, thought for a long moment, and knew that the step *was* irrevocable. Raising the letter, he pressed his lips again and again to the name that signed it, and then tore the pages into shreds.

"Oh, God grant that I may never see her again," he murmured brokenly.

The Curse of Mahendra.

A TALE OF SOUTHERN INDIA.

By RUSSELL SIDNEY.

"WELL, old fellow, so you're off at last! Good luck to you! May you bring back the biggest tusk of the rascaldest old rogue-elephant that ever burdened mother-earth."

"My blessing with you, Reid. Lucky dog! I only wish I had a chance of putting a ball into the monster's carcase. Great Scot! what wouldn't I give to be you, instead of sweltering here in this confounded hole."

"I wish with all my heart you could join me, Stewart; but cheer up, old fellow, your turn will come next," answered the subject of these vehement valedictions—a young civilian, tall, dark and well-knit together—as he passed quickly out of the mess-bungalow of the 91st M.N.I., followed by several men anxious to speed his departure on a shooting expedition among the jungles of the Western Ghauts of Southern India.

"Look out, as it's your first elephant hunt, Reid. Remember what I told you; the brutes are ticklish sport. Aim right in the centre of the forehead with steady hand and clear head, about fifteen paces off if possible. Should you miss, put a ball in the hollow of the eye with your second barrel; if *that* misses, *sauve qui peut*. That's my last word of advice," quoth the major, the old *shikari* of the party. "You bring to mind my first shot——"

As the worthy man was deemed to be prolix over his well-known narratives, he was summarily interrupted by the discordant voices of several irreverent youngsters, giving their equally valuable hints and admonitions, mingled with many despairing groans at the irony of an indiscriminating fate, which doomed them to hateful musketry practice on the sultry plains.

Among the turmoil of voices, Reid was calmly superintending the bestowal of some few remaining traps and packages in the dark recesses of the bullock cart, and after some necessary directions to his boy, Runghiah, an olive-brown sinister-expressed Tamil, he himself finally disappeared into its mysterious depths.

With a last grip of the hand nearest to him, a hearty farewell cheer from the younger men, a series of unearthly sounds from the native driver, a flick of the huge whip, a twist to each of the bullocks' tails, as the lumbering vehicle crawled slowly out of the mess-compound, the young man at length set off on his night journey to the foot of the distant Western Ghauts, outlined clear and dark against the deep blue vault of the starry sky. The moon was just rising, and the vivid silver light fell on the rustling palmyra groves, the massive mango topes, the slender cocoa-nut palms, the broad expanse of paddy-fields and the yellow stretches of sand extending in a series of arid undulations to the mountain range. As he leant out of the door of his primitive conveyance, finishing his cheroot before finally composing himself for a few hours' sleep, Reid smiled to himself with a half-boyish grin of self-satisfaction, as he watched the fast disappearing lights of the little station of Manapatti. At last he was on the eve of the realization of one of his fondest dreams. At last he was to take part in an elephant hunt, and all the true British ardour for sport seemed to possess his soul.

Fortunate fellow! Gifford Reid was indeed what may be termed lucky; he had very little to complain of, very few wishes ungratified. A spoilt child of fortune, very tender were the rose leaves that had as yet ruffled his pathway. At the top of the list when he passed out for the Civil Service, with interest at home and in India, from the commencement of his career he had been placed at good stations, and told every day in the week he was on the high road to splendid appointments, as soon as some few years of service had passed over his head. He was, moreover, engaged to a sweet girl in old England—what could he want more?

Besides, he was hard-working, with a true love for his profession, and had just published a manual on Indian law which had taken the Presidency by storm, and had even been permitted by Government to be entered among the sacred departmental archives. It was anent this book he owed the prospect of the proposed shooting expedition. Constant work and hard study had told upon him, and when the last corrected proof had been sent to the printers, he had applied for a month's leave to the Western Ghauts.

Nothing to me is more strangely weird than a night's journey

in a bullock bandy along the silent Indian roads, through the sleepy Hindu villages, with their roused howling, pariah dogs holding concert with the barks of the prowling jackals. Jogging slowly under the spreading branches of the grotesque banyan trees, arched across the path and throwing ghostly shadows among the quivering lights; passing the wayside chutrams, with the fires lighted by wandering beggars and benighted travellers still smouldering among the ashes; ever and anon catching glimpses of the time-worn temples, standing out in the moonlight grey and ghostly, with their shapely pillars, ornate carvings and dusky impenetrable depths of shade; skirting the wide silvery expanse of brimming tanks, gleaming in the moonlight, and crossing now and again some mighty river, flowing peacefully to the sea. It is a wonderful scene; an uncanny and creepy feeling steals over one as the intervals of silence are broken by the rasping croak of the bull-frog or the shrill cry of the night-hawk.

Reid may not have been influenced in the same way, or perhaps not much given to sentiment. He was not in the humour for moonlight musings, for he soon turned his back upon the prospect, lay full length on his mattress, and was in a few moments in the land of happy dreams.

Just as the dawn was breaking in the east, with that sudden and brilliant glow peculiar to India, the bullock cart rumbled into the street of the native village at the foot of the Ghauts, a violent twist of the tails exciting the patient animals into a last expiring effort of extraordinary activity.

The unwonted sharp trot and increased shaking of the country-made springs roused Reid from his slumbers, and he awoke just as his native servant appeared at the door for orders.

They had pulled up at the house of the head man of the district, who, under commands from the collector, was to find the necessary coolies to carry the tonjon (a covered chair) and the baggage up the pass.

A loud call brought several dark forms to the front, among them the *Tahsildar* himself, salaaming and declaring all was ready as the sahib had ordered.

"Would the sahib partake of a little coffee before starting?"

Sipping the welcome beverage as he sat in a solitary chair placed in the low verandah, Reid watched, in the cool grey light of the morning, the preparations for his transit up the precipitous

mountain paths to the coffee plantation to which he was bound. Some score of nearly naked men swarmed round, gesticulating and jabbering over the distribution of the loads, while the indefatigable Runghiah of evil countenance arranged matters to his own satisfaction and his master's welfare with authoritative serenity and quiet activity.

For methodical management, attention to essential details, and minute observance to the personal comfort of his employer, there is no servant under the sun of any clime or nation equal to a first-class native boy. He is a factotum, valet, caterer, *chef de cuisine*, butler and steward, all in one. Without him India is a desert.

In a quarter of an hour the little body of men was under way ; the tonjon bearers singing their wild characteristic rhyme in time to the stereotyped jog-trot march along the paddy bunds leading to the Ghauts, towering purple, mist-covered above them, their lofty summits gold-glinted in the rays of the rising sun.

The path soon began to ascend by the banks of a small rushing stream, nearly hidden in a thick jungle of oleanders and tropical undergrowth.

Very beautiful are these Western Ghauts, extending far south to Cape Comorin, and rearing their massive crowns in precipitous buttresses of jungle-covered rock to the height of some 4,000 or 5,000 feet. Deeply indented with picturesque ravines, down which thunders many a mountain torrent ; thickly clothed with magnificent primeval forests, the haunt of the elephant, tiger, wild boar, deer, and smaller game, they present an ideal paradise to the hunter ; and it was with a sigh of pleasant anticipation Reid, as he ascended higher and higher, viewed the scenes of what he trusted would prove his future deeds of prowess.

Four hours' continuous climb, through increasingly wilder and more beautiful scenery, brought him to the shoulder of the pass, where the road began the descent into the Travancore district, and entered the first coffee clearing, on which was situated the bungalow of Reid's friend. Some few hundred feet below, it stood out in the distance, built on a spur of the hills, with huge precipices bounding it at the back, and an extensive view of mountain, forest, and gorge in front, stretching far away to a silver line on the horizon—the gleam of the Indian Ocean. A hearty welcome from the Scotch planter and a breakfast fit for

the gods, or better still a hungry man, ravenous from inhaling the keen mountain air, awaited Reid's arrival ; and after doing justice to the repast and giving the last station *gup*, he commenced plying his host with questions relative to the object of his visit.

"Come here," said the coffee-planter, Graham by name, stepping outside the rough but cosy sitting-room on to the verandah. "I'll show you in a trice what you are to expect. Look there," pointing to a small forest clearing some hundred feet below them down the nearest gorge, "that's my new bit of coffee-planting this season ; two nights ago a band of elephants broke through the jungle and killed two coolies. I can't get a soul to go down there now. The brutes up-rooted the freshly-planted bushes, and played Old Harry all round. We'd better organize a shooting party in that direction, and some fellows are coming to tiffin to-day to talk it over with you."

"What's the name of the peak to your left, Graham? What a grand mass of rock and forest it is, towering over the rest like a monarch!" and Reid designated with his hand a magnificent mountain almost facing him, whose picturesque, clear-cut form was outlined against the deep cobalt of the sky. The sun, though high, had not penetrated the dark forest-covered ravines and gorges indenting its massive shoulders, and they showed in dark purple furrows down the precipitous sides many thousand feet to the deep valleys below. In shape and size it dwarfed the surrounding hills.

"That's Mahendragheri, or the Mother of the Mountains, the sacred mountain of the hill tribes. No European has, as yet, set foot in its forest recesses, or scaled its rocky heights. The jungle is too impenetrable and the precipices too stiff. Besides, the hill men put every obstacle in the way of getting there if they can. There's a good deal of native superstition and folklore mixed up with it. As far as I can gather, the Mother of the Mountains is, from all accounts, a most malignant old lady, and pursues with her curse any unfortunate who presumes to intrude on her domain. All I can vouch for from my own knowledge is, that I and some other fellows have twice set off determined to hunt on those forbidden grounds and ill-luck has attended us on both occasions."

"You don't surely attribute your misfortunes to the natives' gross superstitions?" asked Reid with evident scorn.

"Not certainly as the cause of the effect. I only insinuate that when Bond broke his leg by a nasty fall on the first day of our expedition, necessitating an immediate return to send him post haste down to the plains; and when I had to come back quicker than I went on our second trial, to find my drying sheds nearly burnt to the ground, there is something in these coincidences to give colour to the native tradition, that no stranger puts foot on Mahendra with impunity. Naturally our disasters were nuts to the aborigines."

"Are elephants there too?" questioned Reid, scanning the scene attentively.

"It's their stronghold, but they are held sacred also. One must get leave from the Travancore Rajah, any way, to shoot them on this side of the Ghauts, and he rarely vouchsafes it. I have, however, a standing order, owing to their depredations and the danger to the coolies and *tapal** men travelling from here to Travancore. If any invade my territory or are on the main roads I have permission to dispatch them if I can. There's an old rogue-elephant that comes down from Mahendra. I have a heavy score against him, but it would be a brave man to follow his tracks into those unknown jungles over there; besides," added Graham with a slight smile, "the natives call him 'Shaitan,' the Devil."

The conversation then turned on other matters, the merits of guns, balls and various accoutrements dear to every *shikari's* heart. Some days passed quickly and happily enough, but no elephant fell to the guns of Reid and his friends, though every morning brought tidings of fresh depredations committed by the huge beasts. Awe-stricken coolies related, in excited tones, how one man after another had been attacked and killed by the much dreaded rogue-elephant, who appeared to vanish into thin air when the enthusiastic hunters were put upon his track. The continued recital of this monster's misdeeds excited Reid intensely.

He swore "that cursed brute should give up the ghost from a shot from his express."

Graham only shook his head gravely. He was a quiet staid man, a strict Presbyterian; he looked rather scandalized at his companion's vehemence.

* Native postmen.

One day better luck attended the party; a small female elephant fell to Reid's rifle, and he was thereby rendered much elated. There was so much of honest boyish enthusiasm and eager excitement about him, that the soberer members of the expedition felt drawn towards him, as to a younger brother fresh from school.

It was delightful to these hard-worked men, living for the greater part of the year lonely and isolated lives, to meet with a spirit so untrammelled by worldly care, throwing off so completely the thralldom of office and appearing so little spoilt by the adoration of society. Reid was always the favourite in every station he entered, where his modest and straightforward character and brilliant abilities endeared him to all. He had many sterling virtues, counterbalanced by fewer faults than most men; chief among the latter was a rather headstrong determination united to a nervous excitability often verging on passion.

Moreover the intense study of law during the past months spent on the plains during the hottest season of the year, with a touch of fever towards the close, had told upon him more than he was aware, and this leave to the hills was as the balm of Gilead to his jaded brain and body.

Towards the end of the third week, when two more elephants, with many smaller heads of game, had made up a goodly bag, the foreman of the estate, a dark, wiry-limbed Tamil, presented himself in the early morning as Graham and his friend were enjoying their *chota hazari* in the cool shade of the verandah prior to arranging their plans for the day.

With a lugubrious countenance the man demanded an interview with his master. Graham stepped aside and after some minutes of earnest conversation came back slowly, with his long Scotch face perceptibly graver and more anxious.

"No bad news, I hope?" queried Reid.

"They are queer creatures, these natives," returned Graham, sitting down to his unfinished cup of chocolate. "One never knows when their keen susceptibilities will be offended, and often the very thing one imagines is being done for their benefit they will calmly tell you is bringing untold horrors upon them. That's why no European treatment will ever efface cholera; their prejudices are so great, they would rather die than owe their lives to our drugs or our doctors. At all events, I despair of

seeing any improvement or signs of enlightened civilization among these hill-men. What do you think Moses, though he professes Christianity, has just told me? It appears that rogue-elephant has been at his pranks again. I was in hopes he had retired to his native fastnesses in the heart of Mahendra, but he took a short nocturnal walk last night down the Travancore Ghaut, met our poor *tapal* man ascending with the bag, seized him, mauled the poor wretch out of all recognition and returned to the jungle, where his tracks can be seen making back to his haunts in the sacred mountain. The *tapal* man's son was with him and providentially escaped. He brought the news but not our letters; they are scattered, I fear beyond recovery, at the scene of the catastrophe.

"But here's the queer part. Moses solemnly affirms that in his opinion and the coolies', all the past disasters and this crowning misfortune are to be laid to our door! *We*, my dear fellow, have brought these calamities upon these innocent victims by our indiscriminate slaughter of the herd of sacred elephants. You, above all, Reid, by your irreverent manner of talking of Mahendra, and your known blood-thirstiness against the holy animals, have incurred the wrath of the Great Spirit of the Mountain. The natives are fully determined this rogue-elephant is the Devil himself let loose upon our devoted heads, as a punishment for your blasphemy. Moses summed up his indictment by gravely asking me if you could not be persuaded to return sooner to the plains so as to avert further misfortunes."

The absurdity of the idea made both men laugh.

"Instead of departing earlier I'll employ the short time that remains to me in hunting up this evil monster and making him pay the just penalty for his crimes. Come, Graham, stir your stumps, old man, and give directions for beaters at once. I'll see to the rifles and will be ready as soon as you are."

With excited voice and gesture, Reid rose preparatory to going to his room. Graham placed his hand on the young man's arm.

"It's no use, my dear fellow, you'll not get a hill-man to follow you. If I could make up a party I'd do so with pleasure. In the meanwhile I have already sent some coolies down the ghaut for the poor fellow's remains. They'll be back by tiffin time, and we shall hear more definitely in which direction the rogue

has made tracks ; he is, by now, twenty or thirty miles above, in the heart of the jungles of Mahendra, where I, for one, decline to follow him. Living amongst the natives as I do I never run counter to their prejudices more than I can help. Besides, without the aid of the hill-men, whose superstitious fears are just now greatly excited, it would be impossible to attempt the expedition. They alone know the land-marks and beaten tracks through the jungle."

"I declare, to hear you talk, Graham, you might have changed places with my boy, Runghiah, who is the most bigoted heathen alive," answered Reid with ill-concealed impatience. "He has been inwardly cursing me, I am positive, for every shot I have fired and has done poojah to the Devil ever since his arrival here. And if you believe in the power of the evil eye, you watch him when I inveigh against elephants. He positively glares at me. But this is all rot, not following up these tracks! Look here, Graham, if you are so confoundedly particular about hurting their feelings, I'll take the responsibility of tackling these fellows, and see if a little bribery and corruption will not make them change their minds. Surely, the death of this brute is more to be desired than a repetition of this morning's slaughter. I certainly consider that in the cause of humanity the rogue should be dispatched as expeditiously as possible. Should I be able to collect a sufficient number of coolies, you will not stand in my way if I go alone?"

"No," replied the planter doubtfully. "I cannot, of course, coerce your movements. I can only give you my view of the matter as my experience dictates. However, you'll not get a man to go with you, I am confident."

Contrary, however, to Graham's expectations, and to his undisguised surprise—by what persuasions and golden keys he never discovered—in half an hour's time Reid appeared with his scratch troop of guides and beaters, fully equipped for the expedition.

The young man had recovered his temper and good spirits. He laughingly asked Graham to congratulate him and wish him "Good luck."

"I wish you a safe return," answered the Scotchman with some gravity. "Don't be fool-hardy, and follow the hill-men's directions implicitly, is my last word of advice."

"Runghiah comes with me. He understands their lingo, so I

can't go wrong. Ta-ta, old man! Here's death to the sacred elephant of Mahendra, to the old rogue of a Shaitan."

As the words passed the young civilian's lips, Graham happened to catch the transient expression on the face of Reid's native servant. His whole countenance was disfigured by a look of concentrated hatred and heathen fanaticism, as his sinister, deep-set eyes rested on his master with a fierce vindictive glare. Feeling Graham's gaze directed towards himself the man's habitual reserved suavity of manner instantly returned, but that fleeting glimpse had revealed to Graham the innermost recesses of an evil and revengeful spirit.

He felt inclined to draw Reid aside and warn him—of what? A moment's thought showed how slight were his grounds for any tangible suspicion, and, moreover, while he debated the opportunity was lost. Reid, with impatient stride, was already some way down the road towards the spur that connected their side of the valley with the stupendous mountain opposite.

With a strange foreboding of evil, Graham turned back into his bungalow, where he remained writing letters for the homeward mail till roused by the return of his foreman, who had headed the party to recover the corpse of the *tapal* man.

The native entered slowly and after salaaming said in a low, concentrated voice:

"Is it true, sahib, that Reid Sahib done gone to Mahendrag-heri?"

"True that he has gone towards the mountain, but many things may turn him back from venturing far, Moses," returned Graham in measured accents.

The Tamil clasped his thin, nervous hands with a gesture of despair.

"Why Master Sahib let young master go? See, Graham Sahib, I tell you true. The curse of Mahendra will be upon him! She will bear no strange foot upon her mountain. He will die, that brave young sahib! Even if he kill the sacred elephant it is nothing. He only kill the body. The Shaitan will still follow him. As the elephant dies, so will he himself die! I have said."

"How you, a Christian, can talk such utter bosh surpasses my understanding! I am ashamed of you, Moses!" ejaculated Graham with some severity.

"See, sahib," returned the foreman respectfully, but with quiet decision, "the missionary sahibs they persuade one, two, three, maybe ten men to serve Christian God, one in this village, one in that. They teach them God is good, all sin bad, Christian God very strong, Devil very weak, very much afraid ; but, think you, sahib, because those few men do Christian worship among all the thousand, thousand heathen round, all bad has become good—that the Shaitans are frightened away by those ten men ? I am a Christian true, Graham Sahib, and I pray Christian God, but the devils of the heathen are still here. The Shaitan of Mahendra will not go for me, nor for twenty missionary sahibs. It is as strong as death and as cruel as sin !"

The man spoke with repressed vehemence and honest conviction.

His master did not answer. Long experience warned him how futile was argument against the most deep-rooted superstitions of the natives, who through long ages of darkness, from generation to generation, have been in bondage to the powers of evil. Besides, the astute Tamil's crude theory after all hit the right nail on the head. A few conversions here and there would never uplift the pall of heathen ignorance or lessen the gross abominable vice with which the Indian races are imbued. Too truly had Moses attested to the presence of the Devil and all his works still presiding in their midst. The Shaitan had not been dislodged from his fastnesses ; he had not even been shaken.

The long tropical day dragged on slowly to its close ; the dark blue shadows deepened in the valleys and crept up the mountain sides ; the distant ranges glowed in a crimson haze, while the western horizon shimmered in golden flame.

Graham stood anxiously watching for some sign of the hunting party. At his desire the overseer had gone down the mountain to the connecting spur, to render assistance if necessary, some coolies accompanying him with refreshments and torches.

But as yet there was no sign nor sound of human voice.

If returning triumphant, far down the ghaut and across the precipitous gorge would be wafted the cheerful song of the Tamils and the wild, weird hunting chant of the hill-men.

The sunlight faded ; the intense blue-grey twilight, peculiar to

those regions, descended on the cold, clearly-defined forms of the higher mountains, leaving the lower depths in impenetrable shadow. Soon night had thrown her sable mantle over the whole scene.

Graham at midnight gave up hope of his friend's return till the morrow.

At early dawn, after a restless, broken sleep, he set out down the path to Mahendragheri, accompanied by Moses and some coolies, who had returned overnight with no tidings of the hunting party.

For some distance they walked rapidly through the cleared portion of the coffee estate, and then entered the beautiful forest, clothing all the available points of vantage on the gigantic precipices.

Graham was too occupied with anxious thoughts to give much attention to the scene around him, yet it was fair enough to merit more than a passing glance. Lovely ferns, rare orchids, and luxuriant creepers lined the rock-bound way, while overhead the thick and varied foliage of grand old monarchs of the woods threw a grateful shade on the steep and rugged path below. A trickling, murmuring stream often crossed the road, tumbling down the rocks to join the main torrent, rushing madly over its boulder-strewn bed in the cool, purple depths of the gorge far down the ghaut, its sullen roar often striking on the ear.

In about two hours the spur was crossed to the opposite side, and Graham stood on the outlying flank of the great sacred mountain. He was still, however, on a well-beaten track to some coffee-plantations on the further side of the ravine, but it was not till after another hour's further trudge that he came across signs of the divergence of the hunting party from the main road. Here and there, at longer and shorter intervals, appeared abundant signs of the proximity of elephants; their well-beaten tracks through gigantic elephant-grass were evident on all sides, leading from the heart of the mountain to the ravine below.

It was one of these Reid had followed, according to the opinion of the hill-men. With the same unerring sagacity of the North American Indian they can track man and beast through the pathless jungles.

Graham and his coolies halloed and coo-ee'd to attract attention. The forest rang with their shouts, and the echoes resounded clear and sharp from one precipice to another.

"If he's living he must hear and call back," muttered the Scotchman.

But, as of old to the worshippers of Baal, there was neither speech nor language, nor any that answered.

Just as Graham was debating the advisability of running counter to the openly-expressed terror of the natives and ascending the mountain in search of his friend, a long-drawn, distant cry broke upon his ear. With might and main he answered back, and strode rapidly in the direction of the voice on one of the beaten elephant tracks leading steeply up into the thickest jungle of Mahendra, followed at a lagging distance by his half-hearted crew.

In a short time, tearing down the precipitous path in hot haste, consternation and distress depicted upon his countenance, appeared one of the hill-men who had elected to follow Reid. His story was soon told.

"The sahib had shot the rogue-elephant with his own hand right through the forehead, *there*," and the native put his finger to the centre of his black, perspiring brow. "The huge beast had sunk down, dead as a stone; but as they ran up to the sahib he too had fallen down. Runghiah and the coolies were now carrying him through the jungle. He did not know for certain if the sahib was dead. He was white—so white. He looked like death. It was the Shaitan of Mahendra who had struck him down in vengeance for his slaughter of the sacred elephant."

It appeared, on further inquiry, that the day before Reid had tracked the brute far up into the recesses of the forest, and, losing the trail at dusk, had encamped on the mountain for the night. Early in the morning he had resumed the hunt, and had met with his enemy above the jungle, among the coarse thick grass clothing the summit of the mountain.

As Graham listened to this recital numerous footsteps heralded the approach of the rest of the party.

Borne on the shoulders of the natives was the prostrate body of Gifford Reid, followed by Runghiah, whose face wore an expression of vindictive exultation.

The planter glanced at him suspiciously, and then at his master, who, at first sight, appeared lifeless.

A hasty inspection proved he was still breathing, though whether suffering from a faint, a hurt, or sunstroke, Graham was unable to ascertain. He rapidly made up an improvised hurdle, placed the unconscious man upon it, and hurriedly turned his steps homeward. Reid, under rough but efficacious treatment, soon regained his senses, and declared his belief that as soon as he had shot the elephant, seeing his aim had taken effect, he had sprung forward into the open under the full rays of the blazing sun, and felt himself struck down on the instant by them.

He appeared nervously anxious to verify and reiterate this version of his story, and, strange to say, showed none of that natural elation at accomplishing the object of his expedition as might have been expected.

He did not even bemoan the abandonment of the valuable tusks, as the coolies could not be induced to return for them. Thus the defunct monarch of Mahendra was left to rot, a prey to wild beasts and myriad ants.

After a day or two Reid professed himself well enough to descend the Ghauts to Manapatti, and Graham did not oppose his decision, deeming it best that he should obtain, without further delay, proper medical advice.

He was not, in fact, easy about his friend. Reid appeared to have received some severe mental shock. He was silent, depressed, and, for so bright and genial a spirit, even morose. The only topic of conversation with which he broke the monotony of silence was to repeat in low tones the history of the hunt.

"Look! I hit him there, Graham. Just as the major told me, straight and clean in the centre of his forehead. It was a grand shot! My hand never swerved, my eye never wavered! The ball went straight to the brain, Graham, straight as a die to the brain."

Once his friend detected him with his forefinger pressed firmly in the middle of his forehead—so firmly there was a perceptible red mark left as he drew it hastily away. He laughed uneasily.

"Do you know what my boy has just told me?" he asked in a quick, nervous manner. "He inquired with tender solicitude if I felt any pain here. And when I replied why the deuce I should

feel a pain there or anywhere else, he answered with his usual sardonic grin, 'Pardon, sahib, me very glad to hear master say that thing. The curse of Mahendra is there! No pain, then the Shaitan no hurt master!' I told him to hold his tongue, and not talk such folly. But afterwards I couldn't for the life of me resist asking about this dread curse, upon which he answered with solemn unction, 'Master hit the sacred elephant here,' touching his forehead. 'Where the elephant die, master have plenty pain! Master die, too!'"

"That is the superstition, I believe," remarked Graham.

"All I can say is, and you may laugh at me as a fool, old man, ever since that idiot spoke I have had a pain there."

The Scotchman did not laugh. He felt assured that from the effects of undue exposure and excitement his friend was on the verge of a serious illness. Fever, probably, was heralding its advent by these signs of mental aberration and hysterical fancies. The sooner he could get him down the ghaut the better, and without more ado he determined to set off then and there with his suffering guest.

Reid acquiesced without a demur. He seemed strangely subdued, and relapsed into silent moodiness.

The evening found both men on the plains, installed in the dak bungalow. Much to Graham's disgust, he found, even with the united efforts of the *Tahsildar* and his own foreman, there would be no chance of procuring a bullock bandy for two or three hours. He was, perforce, obliged to possess his soul in patience, and bear the tedium of the delay as best he could.

After a hasty meal (at which Reid ate nothing), he went out into the verandah to watch for the promised vehicle. The air of the inner room appeared stifling after the clear keen atmosphere of the hills. He could not, however, prevail on Reid to join him; and the conviction gained upon him that the poor fellow was rapidly getting worse, and felt too ill for any exertion. Having made the invalid as comfortable as inadequate means permitted, and as his presence seemed to irritate him, the planter left him to his own thoughts and dreamy silence in the dim dusk of the gathering night.

How long he sat wrapt in his own anxious musings—his ear strained to catch the sound of the expected conveyance, the time appearing interminably long and dreary—he never knew, but

suddenly he was struck by the intense stillness of the inner room.

Once or twice before, 'at intervals, Reid had moved, coughed, heaved an audible sigh, and otherwise given tangible proofs of his presence ; but now not a sound, not a movement disturbed the heavy waves of sultry air. Once Runghiah had glided in, and returned to report, in passionless subdued accents, " Reid Sahib was sleeping—sleeping fast." Beyond that interruption the sick man had been left undisturbed. Graham rose hastily with an undefined fear, and entering the whitewashed scantily-furnished room, passed quickly to the centre table at which sat Reid.

He was leaning back with his head resting against the high hard back of the wooden chair, his legs placed, crossing each other, on the edge of the table. In the dim uncertain light his face looked drawn, grey, and very still. But on the up-turned forehead was a small round mark, from which trickled down, over the pallid skin, a ghastly red stream, dyeing the white shirt beneath and falling drop by drop on the floor. As Graham touched the cold nerveless hand hanging down by the side, the terrible truth flashed upon him.

He called wildly for a light, and by its wavering rays he saw Gifford Reid was dead ! Shot by his own hand through the brain by a little pocket revolver of small smooth bore and noiseless action.

It had fallen from the limp cold hand on to the matted floor.

The curse of Mahendra was accomplished ! The Shaitan of the Mountain had claimed his victim—or had Runghiah anything to do with it ?

Who can tell ?

Mrs. Savill's Quest.

A STORY IN THREE CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I.

THE CLACHAIG.

THE December afternoon was closing in over the wild and gloomy pass of Glencoe. Two people had just descended from a wagonette in the open space before the door of the Clachaig, the little inn situated half-way up the pass, above the ruined huts which mark the scene of the Macdonalds' massacre. Mists were settling round the mountains and descending the pass, whilst overhead the sunset colour in the sky was being rapidly obscured by hurrying clouds. A stormy evening was impending.

The carriage had come down the pass from the King's House, and the down droop of the horses' heads and the relaxed attitude of their bodies attested their weariness. Their fatigued look appealed to the young man, who stood puffing his pipe watching, whilst his companion knocked at the closed door of the inn.

"It looks bad, John," she said, turning her eyes from the gloomy greyness around to his face. "I am afraid it is beginning to rain."

"It is beginning, and it means going on. How far is it to Ballachulish, coachman?"

"About six miles, sir."

"Six miles! Well, Barbe, if they can take us in here, here we'd better stay."

"Stay here!" the lady exclaimed in dismay.

No wonder she gazed round dismayed. For nowhere can solitude look more solitary than in the granite bosom of the hills above Glencoe. A promise of tea, however, sounded alluring, and almost in a moment, it seemed, a fire was blazing, and the landlady brought in some new-baked scones and smoking tea.

"I am afraid, sir, I can't give you rooms," she replied to their question; "my rooms is both engaged and this sitting-room. But the gentleman as took them a fortnight ago has never been in, except for some lunch once or twice, since the first day."

"He isn't likely to come to-night, then? You couldn't turn us away this weather."

"No, sir; it'll be a nasty night. Well, sir, if you will engage to turn out, if he should come, I'm willing to make you comfortable."

And so it was settled.

Their quarters looked cosy and comfortable a little later, by comparison with the rising wind and swirls of rain outside, with the firelight playing on the shining panels of the walls. But Mrs. Savill had not the accompaniment of a cheerful mind, through which all circumstances can be seen in a rosy glow.

"It is a wild-goose chase, John," she said, withdrawing her eyes from the gloom beyond the uncurtained window, to her brother's face. "How lazy and comfortable you look!"

"I am," he answered smilingly. "Of course I am sorry for you," he went on, in answer to a reproachful look. "But it's your own fault, Barbe."

"That doesn't make it any better," she said, watching the sparkling of her rings in the rosy glow.

"Oh! I don't agree. When things are my own fault I don't grumble at the consequences. But if other people give me the discomfort, I—well, I do grumble."

"You needn't tell me that. You would be grumbling now, without books or papers, if it weren't for that ridiculous pipe. Now I hate having to be angry with myself as well as with circumstances." A mist came over the dark brightness of her beautiful eyes as she spoke.

"It's such a silly punishment!" she said presently.

"It's a very effective one, since it has brought you after him," he suggested.

"You forget Nancy," she murmured, "my little Nancy."

"Who is always quite happy with her father."

"Oh, yes! She will be happy. But Andrew won't. He is always sorry when he has acted hastily. He has done it because he said he would do without me. But I know he is sorry enough by now. Just as sorry as I am," she finished softly.

"I can't think what possessed you to go to that place, Barbe, when you know how he objected to those people. You are very wilful."

"I can't think either now. I was fascinated by Mrs. Compton—everybody is—and it was a compliment, in a way. But I didn't enjoy it—the people were not my sort."

Some recollection brought a tone of contempt into her voice, and a scornful look on her proud young face. She went on:

"I was so glad when the week was over. And then, oh, John! no one to meet me at Euston. I could scarcely believe my eyes when Andrew wasn't on the platform. Oh! how unhappy I felt during the drive through the dismal streets in the rain. And then, home! The house all dark, no lamp lighted——" She stopped, her voice trembling.

"Poor Barbe," her brother said affectionately.

"And when cook opened the door, so surprised to see me, I had to make up a story all on the spur of the moment, for I saw that Andrew had really done what he said he would. And good old cook, without a suspicion, telling me how master had arranged for Jane and nurse to have a holiday whilst we were away—he thought I should look in for some clothes—and how he and Nan had come to Scotland. And then I telegraphed to you to come to me."

"And all we have to guide us to the whole of Scotland," he said, laughing, "is your recollection that he used to stay at, and love, a lonely cottage on Loch Leven. And after haunting Loch Leven, in Kinross, we've come here into Argyll, and can hear nothing."

"We shall find them," Barbe said confidently. "No one so pretty as my Nancy could be hidden long."

"And we ask all over for an interesting-looking man and a beautiful baby," her brother went on teasing. "No wonder people stare!"

"Oh, if I had but believed he meant it!" said Barbe.

"I should have thought by this time that you might have known he would do just what he said."

"Oh, but not such a thing as this."

"Yes, even such a thing as this. Perhaps he has never had occasion to threaten before."

"Oh! I've been obstinate now and then."

"That I well believe. You women are all alike. You think you can play with the people who love you, and you imagine they are as little likely to abide by their words, as your own uncertain selves. I hope this will be a lesson to you."

"Perhaps it will," she said softly. "Only let me find them."

CHAPTER II.

THE COTTAGE.

THE next morning, an elderly man of soldierly bearing emerged from a solitary cottage, which stands some little distance above the loneliest part of the shore of Loch Leven in Argyllshire. The cottage is squarely built, set down on the moor without garden or inclosure of any kind. It had probably been intended as a keeper's dwelling, or as a shelter in stormy weather for sportsmen on the desolate forest, which extends between Loch Leven and Glen Nevis.

The morning was very wet and gusty, and as the man paused undecidedly, a girl's voice rang out down the passage behind him.

"Oh, Mac, don't forget the Post Office ; there is sure to be a letter to-day. And if you can find a frock for Nancy, bring it. Bring anything—she hasn't a thing left clean to put on."

Mac looked dubious.

"I can wash them white pinnies, Miss Meg," he remarked. "The captain 'll never fancy little missy in anything else."

"Then he shouldn't bring us to such solitudes," the girl laughed. "Andrew! whatever are you doing up there?" she called out, up the stairs.

"I'm rubbing Nan down," a man's pleasant voice called back. "She's just spilt your blacking bottle down her last and only frock."

"Oh, Nancy!" Meg exclaimed. "Then she's got nothing now. She's a pauper. Hadn't you better go over with Mac, Andrew, and get some of her things?"

"Where are her things?"

"In one of your portmanteaux—at the inn. Nurse packed up a lot which I thought we should never want. But Mac must go to Ballachulish—we've no bread, and no flour, and no tea, and no nothing——"

"No doubt he will be able to buy her a frock at the Post Office there—they sell most things. Behold her!"

As he spoke, Captain Andrew Savill descended the stairs, carrying in his arms his baby girl of nearly two. Round his sunburnt neck was clasped one little arm; the quaintly doubled fingers of the other hand, were carefully raised out of the touch of the disfiguring stain, which extended all down the front of her pretty frock, whilst her dainty face expressed the disgust she felt.

"It are nasty!" said Nan with emphasis, crumpling up her face to express her feelings. "It all runned out on Nan."

"Oh, Nan!" said Meg, laughing. "I am afraid you were in mischief. She must certainly have some clothes. You will have to go, Andrew."

"And leave you all alone, Meg! You'd be frightened to death."

"There's Sally. No, I shall not be frightened. We'll bolt the doors. The weather is bad, I allow," she said candidly; "but as Mac must go, you'd better go too."

"It's a good walk up to the Clachaig," he remonstrated. "Wrap her up in one of my jackets."

"Faver's dacket," agreed Nan delightedly.

"No, Nan. You'll take to jackets—trust you—quite soon enough. You'll get a lift, Andrew, and take one of the kits with you—it will keep the things dry."

"And if the weather gets worse and we can't get back?" her brother asked solemnly.

"Well, then—Nan and I will starve—or eat Sally."

The child's fair head went back and she laughed delightedly.

"Eat Sally," she echoed blissfully.

* * * * *

From the rain-blurred window of the Clachaig, Mrs. Savill and her brother watched the only vehicle which had passed, all through the morning, unload. Macintoshes, brown gaiters, deer-stalkers and turned-up collars make all men look much alike, and it was only the size and military bearing of a back, of which she caught just a glimpse, that sent the blood rushing into Mrs. Savill's face.

"There is Andrew, I do believe! Look, John, quick! quick!"

But no one in the least resembling his brother-in-law, presented himself to Mr. Reece's observation.

"Not half big enough," he said, watching the descent and rush into the house. "They'll eat up all the food," he went on hungrily. "Have you ordered anything, Barbe?"

He was answered by the entrance of the landlady bearing in their lunch.

"If you please, sir, the gentleman has come," she said. "He wants some things, and he's gone upstairs."

"And he wants the rooms?" asked Mrs. Savill dismayed.

"No, mem, not at all. I told him what I'd done to accommodate you—the weather being so bad—and he said I was quite right. He's going to get a snack of lunch and go directly. He's in a great hurry."

"Will he not lunch here with us?" said Mr. Reece politely, disregarding his sister's frown. "Please say that we shall be very pleased to see him to lunch."

"How could you, John?" Mrs. Savill said reproachfully. "It may be some one we know."

"If it is, I give you credit, Barbe, for being able successfully to hide, that you have no idea where your husband and child are roaming, and that you are on the warpath after them."

"I'm not equal to strangers," she said, her eyes dimming, "and I wish you wouldn't jest."

"It is best treated as a jest, Barbe," he said kindly. "I am quite sure that if Andrew knew how you are taking it, he would be here to-morrow."

"Please, sir," the landlady said, opening the door, "the gentleman is much obliged to you—but he can't stay, and you are welcome to the rooms as long as you feel inclined."

A rapid step on the gravel outside, suggested that the "snack" must have been a short one, and Mrs. Savill, hastening to the window, saw a tall figure disappearing through the driving rain.

"That was just like Andrew's step," she said quickly. "Oh! John. Run after him."

"Run after a man who has just declined our lunch, Barbe? No, thank you."

"Then I shall go and look at his portmanteau," she said.

"You'll feel rather caught if he's there. You don't know that he's gone."

"I know it is Andrew," she said, with a woman's certainty about her own intuitions.

She was soon back, a tiny sock in her hand.

"See, John, what he has dropped. It is Nan's, I am certain."

"Certain?" said Mr. Reece, looking at the dainty lace-like thing. "How can you be certain? Is it marked?"

"No, it isn't marked. I don't think Nan's are."

"You don't think. And yet you are certain. Oh! you women."

"Did you notice the initials on the trunks?" she questioned.

"Yes, I must honestly say I did," he admitted. "They are so big, they pretty well fill up the room. But other men are asses, Barbe, besides your good husband."

"Other men are not likely to have A. S. S. for their initials," she corrected, with dignity.

"No. They wouldn't print 'em so large if they had, perhaps."

When, later in the afternoon, tea was brought in, Mrs. Savill was discovered looking at a little sock on her lap. The landlady thought that her eyes looked wet, but as the rain drops still sparkled in her pretty hair, perhaps some of them had got into her eyes. She had been out with Mr. Reece on a forlorn voyage of discovery, to see if by chance a lonely cottage could be found above the loch.

"What is the name of the gentleman who has these rooms?" she asked, on being disturbed.

"I think it is one of the Macdonalds, mem. I didn't hear the name of the gentleman who was here to-day—he came afterwards, with the lady and the little child."

"A lady?" said Barbe bewilderedly.

"Yes, mem; a young lady, a pretty creature, always laughing with the baby."

"How old was the little child?"

"Near upon two years I should say, mem."

"What was her name?" breathlessly.

The landlady considered.

"I should say her name it was Ann, mem. She come trotting down the passage, the pretty dear, and when she see me she said, 'Look at Nan's new shoes,' and tumbled over, trying to show me her feet."

Mrs. Savill rose hurriedly.

"My little Nan! My baby!" she murmured. "My little girl," she went on tremblingly. "I have a little one—yes, you reminded me," she said, striving to recover herself. "The names are the same. Mine is very sweet, with fluffy gold hair waving round her face, and big blue eyes, and pretty ways—and she tosses back her head and looks at you—so."

"That's it," said the woman delighted. "That's just like her. Not that I ever see her do it," she said truthfully, "but it's what I should say she would do. I on'y saw her for a minute, mem, being so busy that day."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Savill disappointedly. "And was there no nurse to take care of her?"

"No, mem, only the young lady, her ma."

"A young lady!" Mrs. Savill's head went up in unmistakable displeasure. "Are you sure she was a lady?"

"Quite sure, mem. No mistaking her for anything else. And the little child took after her. They were as like as two peas—as pretty a mother and child as ever I see. And the gentleman played and laughed with the baby, too, all the time. Yes, mem, I expect they are down Ballachulish way. They were talking about a boat, and how to get the things across."

A sense of loneliness and desolation came over the listener as the gloomy afternoon closed in, and she thought of the happy family scene so graphically described. Father, mother, *little* child—no one wanting.

As she brooded in the growing darkness, *her* heart hungered for the sound of her husband's kindly *voice*, for the soft caresses of her little one.

CHAPTER III.

OVER THE LOCH.

THE morning's sunlight and brightness, had opened all the windows and doors, in the cottage above the loch. Meg had just held up a little blue-smocked figure to wave a farewell to her vanishing father going off up the glen with gun and dogs. A curious monotonic singing, of bagpipe-like sound, buzzing through the cottage, allured Nan in search of Mac, from whom it proceeded; whilst Meg, busying herself with household dusting and tidying, listened *amusedly* to the scraps of conversation which reached her.

Nan, looking quaint and bunchy in the blue smock frock, Mac had purchased at the Ballachulish store, trotted through the house and found the big man very busy. His coat was off, his shirt sleeves were turned up, and he was washing with a will at a big tub on the grass. Tiny white garments—the result of his skill—lay spread out on the hillside above him; and these, after pondering for a moment, Nan gravely inspected.

Returning, she stood on tiptoe, and tried to bring her eyes to the level of the tub. Greatly did Nan enjoy this picnic life, which introduced her to such novel delights.

"You'll get splashed, missy," warned Mac.

Nan looked at him.

"How's you do that?" she asked presently, after interested observation.

"What, missy? These pinnies? Oh, they's easy to wash—what they'll be to smooth down afterwards I dunno."

"Nan don't mean them focks. That singin'—are it inside of you, Mac?"

"I s'pose so, missy," Mac answered, recommencing his inharmonious tune, as he slapped the "wash" up and down the side of his tub.

"Funny Mac," the child said presently, laughing in her pretty soft chuckle. "Take Nan up, and see if Nan can do it too."

"No, missy. I know your little pretending ways," said Mac, meeting the blue eyes delightedly. "You only want to get them little fingers of yours in this 'ere water. I knows you."

"Nan wants to sing too," said the little one gravely. "Nan don't care for no washin'."

But the blue eyes belied her words, as they looked longingly at the soapy mass.

"Who tell'd you that singin', Mac?" she asked presently, looking into the big man's face, after he had taken her up into his arms.

"My singin', missy? My mother tell'd it me, years ago."

"Muvver! Has you got a muvver, Mac?" the child asked bewilderedly, trying to reconcile the idea of a pretty young girl-mother, like the one she knew, with the possession of Mac.

Mac knew well, that there was no escaping from the question of those translucent orbs, now on a level with, and searching earnestly his own. So he said:

"No, missy, not now—she's dead long ago."

"Oh!" said Nan, pondering. "What's dead, Mac?"

In his turn, Mac too pondered.

"It's gone away—up in heaven—up there, missy."

The child bent back her head, and gazed earnestly in the direction pointed out by Mac. What she saw in the blue, who can tell? She looked entranced, enthralled—her dainty face flushing in her keen desire to understand. Presently she brought her eyes down to Mac's face.

"Are Nan's muvver up there, Mac?" she asked.

"Nay! The Lord forbid!" the man exclaimed, shocked out of his manners. "Missy's mother will be comin' soon, darling."

"Muvver comin' soon," repeated the child gleefully. "Put Nan down—go and tell Auntie Meg muvver's comin'."

"Bless her little heart!" the man said, as he watched the little figure trot into the house. "To think of her asking if her mar's in heaven."

Meanwhile, up at the Clachaig, the sunshine and soft air, combined with the discovery she thought she had made, were rendering Mrs. Savill a maddeningly restless companion. She could not keep still, but wandered up and down, or ran hastily into the road at the sound of wheels, gazing up at the passing carts with such a look of expectancy and hope upon her face, as drew upon it many admiring eyes.

"Let us go down to the loch and get a boat," she entreated presently.

"Then you've made up your mind to stay here?" her brother asked.

"Quite. Andrew is somewhere near—and I mean to find him."

They got a lift down Glencoe, and hired the nearest boat they could find—a big tub which it took their combined strength to move.

It was one of the lovely winter days which bring back autumn memories. Soft airs, sweet with the smell of pine and heather, played upon their faces as they turned the boat's nose up the loch. A few boats were out, and a small steam yacht rocked them as it fussed past. The upper part of the loch was quite solitary as they coasted lazily along, keeping rhythmical time.

"I wish we had brought tea as well as lunch," said Barbe, "then we could thoroughly explore these banks."

Almost as she spoke, a boat darted past them some hundred yards away, heading up the loch. Two men were sculling rapidly, and the sound of a child's voice travelling to Mrs. Savill's ears, made her turn in hasty observation.

"Yace, faver, yace."

The childish treble came shrilly over the water, bringing the quick blood into Mrs. Savill's face.

They heard soft laughter follow, and a man's voice answering, but they could not hear his words.

The boat sped on, swift as an arrow from a bow, followed by Mrs. Savill's yearning eyes.

"That was Nan," she said quickly. "Now, John, we've got them. Let us 'yace' too."

But the boat was already far ahead, and their own was so heavy, that the only thing they could do, was to keep their quarry in sight, and watch its destination.

Every one knows how distance on the water deceives even experienced eyes; but when at last the little speck disappeared from their sight, they did not doubt being able to run it down.

"I suppose if we do find it, Barbe, you do not doubt being welcome?" once Mr. Reece said to his sister. They had just rounded a point, and he noticed the disappointed expression in her eyes at the loneliness of the loch ahead.

"I've no doubt on that point," she said smiling. "I'm like the prodigal—quite sure. Where can the boat be, John?"

Not the closest observation could discover any sign of life all along the loch. Only the brilliant sunshine was over everything—flooding the still waters with gleams and streaks of gold.

"Somewhere under the trees we shall find a creek—never fear. That boat must have run in somewhere."

"I see something shining," at last said Mrs. Savill. "Yes—it must be the sun on glass windows. See! above that clump of pines on the knoll over there."

But it was farther than they thought, and the afternoon mists were creeping up and the sun descending into the loch behind them, before at last they came upon a little creek with overhanging branches, holding a boat in its shelter.

As they made their own boat fast, and sprang to shore, Mrs.

Savill's eager excitement made even Mr. Reece's more sluggish blood warm.

The trees came down to the water's edge, and the undergrowth of ferns and briars and mosses looked thick and untrodden. They had to search closely in the gloom for indications of broken twigs or trodden herbage, which might lead them in the right direction. As they pushed and broke their way through, and still saw nothing before them but trees, even Mrs. Savill's hopeful spirit grew daunted.

"It will be an awful way back, John, if we don't find anything," she said. "We shall be benighted here."

On they pushed, stumbling, climbing, ascending by slow degrees. At last the way grew more open before them, and soon they emerged into an open space beyond the wood.

It was solitary and wild. Hill rose above hill, grey and dark with black shadows between, forming the great forest which stretches between Loch Leven and Glen Nevis.

Barbe gazed before her in dismay.

"This can't be right," she said. "What can we do, John?"

"We can do nothing but walk on here. There seems a slight path. That boat must have owners not far off, and that shining was a window. Cheer up, Barbe! we'll track them yet."

But Barbe's spirits were sinking lower and lower. The loneliness of this solitary place was oppressive to a degree. She grew silent and her steps more and more slow.

At last, as they surmounted a jagged rock on the hill, they saw set down amid the furze and heather, on a small oasis of green, straight ahead, a cottage facing them.

Barbe uttered a cry and her heart beat quickly.

Blue smoke shot up from a chimney straightly into the evening air. Above it, the higher crags of the mountains still caught a glow from the departed sun. Lights shone in the windows and through the still open door. A woman's figure was silhouetted against the window of an upper room.

Mr. Reece felt the excitement of pursuit in his veins. Barbe was hurrying now with her lightest and fleetest step.

"I am going straight in," she said softly, with shining eyes.

No one was about, but they heard steps at the back of the house as they paused within the open doorway.

A murmur of low voices came down the stairs. A child was

speaking. The intruders pressed in and stood at the foot of the stairs to listen.

"When is muvver comin' home, faver?"

Barbe held her breath, as the pretty baby accents fell upon her ears.

"Soon, darling," she heard her husband's voice reply. "Let father make Nan tidy. Mother wouldn't like to see her Nan looking like a little sweep."

"S'leep," sang the child. "Nan been helping Sally clean her grate."

"So it seems. What would mother say, if she were to come and find her little white Nan looking like a little nigger?"

"Muvver would laugh—so!" The child threw her head back in an ecstatic chuckle.

And then, with a sharp cry of excited delight, she flung herself out of the arms that held her.

For Barbe had sped away up the stairs, and was standing in the doorway.

E. S. CURRY.

A Fair Bindoo.

By JOHN H. WILLMER.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE PRISONER.

"ALL four dead," said Hoyles, examining one after the other the bodies of the robbers. "A great pity. I only wish one, at least, of them were alive, in order to get some information out of him."

"Let us hope that Greengrass will capture his man," said the collector.

"Ay. He was gaining on him when we saw them disappear behind those trees. You may be sure, however, the robber will not let himself be captured easily. He may, you know, give Greengrass his *quietus*."

"I hope not."

"So do I. I wonder where Yakoob cleared off to?"

"Those hills behind us, I should say. What devoted followers his are! These poor fellows saw that the Khan was in imminent danger of being taken and they came and engaged us while he escaped. It was lucky for us there were so few of them."

"More may be further on. I wish I had a score of troopers with me, I would advance towards those hills."

"And be slaughtered—every man jack of you."

"I don't know so much about that."

"You may depend upon it that none of them need a directory to show them about the hill. They are acquainted with every nook and corner, and can advance or hide, whichever manœuvre suits them best."

"Hullo! here comes Greengrass and—what's the matter there?"

"He is making the robber show the way," said the collector. "See, he has him covered with his pistol."

In front the robber was slowly riding; behind him, about a dozen paces, was Greengrass with his pistol pointed at the man's head. After this fashion the two men rode slowly to where Hoyles and the collector were. Immediately on their arrival the prisoner was secured and his arms taken away from him. Before this, the collector had managed to substitute for his dead

horse one belonging to the slain robbers, which was grazing close at hand.

"Well, what is our next move?" asked Greengrass, as soon as he saw there was no chance of escape for the prisoner.

"Home," answered Hoyles.

The others agreed.

"Do you think we'll be able to get any information out of the prisoner?" asked the major of Greengrass as they rode towards Mariepoor.

"I do. If he will persist in refusing to disclose their retreat I'll have him tortured."

"How?" asked the collector.

"With the thumb-screw."

"How did you manage to capture him?" asked Hoyles.

"I must give credit to myself, I did it cleverly. He rounded a hill. I did not. I halted. Thinking I had gone round the other way to meet him, he returned, and we were face to face. He would have ridden full tilt at me, but I had already covered him with my pistol. 'Advance!' cried I, and he had no alternative but to obey."

"Greengrass," said Hoyles, "I owe you much for this capture. I have some hopes now of recovering my—my daughter and Devaki. But—good God! What if harm comes to them? What if Yakoob forces them to marry him?"

Greengrass and the collector made no reply.

"Speak, Greengrass!" cried Hoyles excitedly.

Up till now Hoyles had pent up his grief. Other matters had kept him occupied; but now that he was free, his thoughts flew back to the horrible situation of Helen and Devaki.

"Hoyles, what am I to say?" replied Greengrass. "Can I speak with any certainty?"

"True, you cannot. But you have your fears or hopes."

"It is best not to mention them."

Hoyles spurred on his steed.

"If," cried he, "Yakoob comes within reach of my arm, he or I will not see the sun rise again."

After a pause he asked:

"Greengrass, you will do all in your power to make the prisoner confess what we want him to—will you not?"

"Trust me."

"But what if he prefers death to telling?"

"Then you cannot attach any blame to me. But I am of opinion the thumb-screw will bring him to his bearings."

"I hate torturing," said Hoyles.

"So do I," said the collector.

"But, in a case like the present," explained Greengrass, "we must put aside all nice feelings, because the lives of those dear to us are in imminent peril. We must not hesitate to do what is in our power to wring from this scoundrel a confession."

"You'll find that an extremely hard task," said the collector. "The robbers are made to take terrible oaths never to betray one another."

"I'll try, anyhow—and no man can blame me if I do not succeed."

Thus conversing, they reached Mariepoor. They found that Macbay and Shilstone had returned after a fruitless search. The young officers were delighted when they saw the prisoner Greengrass had made.

"We have now," said Macbay, "the key to Yakoob's stronghold."

"Not the key," corrected the collector, "but one of the keepers of the key. You will find it difficult, I imagine, to get the secret out of the man."

"Torture him," said Shilstone.

"That's what I intend doing," said Greengrass.

"When?"

"I'm off to the police station now."

Macbay and Shilstone followed him. The collector, however, rode away to his quarters, and Hoyles walked over to the hospital, after riding home and giving his horse to its groom. The major found Vincent still unconscious, and he immediately dispatched a couple of soldiers to a small station, about twenty miles away, where a Dr. Boyd was living, asking him to come over and attend Vincent. The hospital apothecary was a useless fellow—an *ignoramus* in fact, and Hoyles felt confident that if Vincent was to be treated by him he would die. He was glad to find Miss Shallowford at her old employment of nursing again—an employment which she loved much.

"It is not long since you nursed the doctor out of a fever, Miss Shallowford," said Hoyles, "and now you have got him back again."

"I did very little towards his recovery last time," said the young lady modestly, which was not assumed. "It was Helen's nursing. Have you any definite news of her?"

"This : she is in the hands of Yakoob."

"Yakoob!" almost shrieked Miss Shallowford.

"Ay. You wonder why I take it so calmly. I seldom or never allow my feelings to picture themselves in my face."

"I know you are suffering," said she. "I know you love your daughter dearly."

"I do, indeed, love Helen."

After a slight pause, Hoyles asked :

"And how is poor Vincent?"

"A bit quieter now. But a few minutes ago he was moaning and talking. He has begun again—listen."

"Helen," whispered Vincent. "Helen, I'll obey you, though I love you best. Yes, I'll be true to her."

"What does he mean?" asked Hoyles as soon as Vincent became incoherent.

"I don't exactly know. But one thing is clear : he loves Helen."

"But he is engaged to Devaki, I am told."

"That's what I can't understand. How alike the two girls are!"

"Have you seen Devaki?"

"Yes."

"I have not had that pleasure. Are the two girls very like one another?"

"There is this difference : Devaki's eyes and hair are black."

"Her mother's were black."

"Did you ever see her?"

"Yes."

"Oh. Somebody told me you had never seen Jaggoonath's wife."

"Jaggoonath's? No—I mean, yes, I did see her, but I never knew she was Jaggoonath's wife till lately."

"Was she very beautiful?"

"Very."

"Helen must take after her mother, and Mrs. Hoyles and Devaki's mother must have been uncommonly alike."

"No, Helen does not resemble her mother very much : her father, more."

Miss Shallowford looked at him and smiled.

"Excuse me saying so," she said, "but I don't think Helen resembles you very much."

"I never said so."

"Oh, yes, you did. You said Helen takes more after her father."

"Did I? I spoke without thinking."

Hoyles now changed the subject, and after a few minutes' conversation, chiefly about Vincent, he left the hospital. He could not have gone ten minutes when Shilstone turned up.

"What news?" asked his betrothed of him, taking his hand in hers.

"None whatever, Grace," answered he. "We have been trying for the last half-hour to get out of the robber Greengrass captured the whereabouts of the Khan's stronghold—but with no success. Not even when he was tortured."

"Tortured! Harry, how *can* you be so cruel? It is a sin to torture."

"I believe you. It seems such an unmanly way of getting out of one what he wishes to conceal. We abused the man for not telling his secret; and yet, if a countryman of ours under torture refused to tell some secret he would be made a hero of. Pah! Torturing is disgusting work. But let us drop the subject. How is Vincent?"

"Bad, poor fellow. The wound is a very deep one."

"What does the apothecary say?"

"Oh, he knows nothing. Every half-hour or so he comes in, shakes his head, mutters, 'Bad, bad,' and out he goes. He makes me very angry. I feel inclined to bang his head up against the wall."

"And it would serve the idiot right if you did."

"Two soldiers died this morning."

"Really? Of what?"

"Cholera. One of the ward boys told me he did absolutely nothing for them. He said there was no use giving them medicine as they were sure to die."

"This must be looked into and the fellow sent away. Are there many ill in hospital?"

"About thirty—nearly all down with fever. Mrs. Macbay is in bed."

"So Macbay told me. Nothing much the matter, is there?"

"No, I don't think so. But one has to be very careful in a climate like this. Mind you don't get ill, Harry."

"Well, I think I should like to, because I know who would nurse me."

"Of course I'd nurse you; but, Harry, it is very wicked to wish to get ill. Wait till I see Mr. White, I'll tell him about you."

"Please don't. He can lecture at times."

"Very well, I'll promise not to—on condition you have no such wicked wishes again."

"It's a bargain."

"By-the-bye, I forgot to tell you that Hoyles has sent over for Dr. Boyd."

"I am glad to hear that; but he will not be here before to-morrow morning, and before that——"

"I'll do my best."

"But you'll get ill keeping up."

"Not I."

"But I don't like you being here all by yourself."

"You great goose. Do you think any one will harm me?"

"No, no—but the robbers?"

"I'm not afraid of them."

"Don't be too boastful. Now I want you to promise me this: you will not, when out for a walk, wander far unless you have a proper escort."

"Please define a 'proper escort.' I may make a mistake, you know. Do you mean when you are with me then I have a proper escort?"

Shilstone laughed.

"Joking apart," said he, "will you promise me?"

"You know I always do your bidding."

"True. And now I must go, as I have some work to attend to. I'll come over by-and-bye and see you."

The business he had to attend to was to hunt up Hoyles and tell him of their non-success in getting the prisoner to tell them of Yakoob's hiding-place. Hoyles was a pitiable object to behold now. He paced up and down his room, at intervals striking his forehead and often crying like a child. Shilstone had no easy task before him, trying to comfort him. The only words he kept uttering were, "God is punishing me. Pride—my pride is

the cause of this, and the unjust treatment of him whom I loved."

Shilstone saw it was no use arguing with him or trying to comfort him, so he left and went over to Greengrass's house, to consult him as to what should be done, for Hoyles was beyond giving commands now that he had heard that the robber would rather die than betray his master.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE ARTICLE IN THE "BOMBAY GUP."

FOR the next few days Mariepoor was in a state of great excitement. The bazaar people—those who were rich—were frightened out of their wits. They dug deep holes and hid their money. But the miserable wretches did this in the face of the whole bazaar, and at night, while they slept, they were robbed. Such a wailing there was next morning. The various idols were consulted, and by the mouths of their priests the idols made answer that Yakoob Khan had spirited their money away.

It will be remembered that Jaggoonath had with him large sums of money belonging to the rich Banyans and Marwarees. Some of this money, the major portion of it, he had lent out; the rest had been stolen. Hearing that Major Hoyles had been instructed to look to the affairs of the dead man, the Marwarees and Banyans flocked to his house and demanded their money; nor would they go away till the police were called in and force used.

Meanwhile, among the Europeans, the daring and impudence of Yakoob was much commented on, and all felt sure that now he had made an attack on Mariepoor, he would repeat it at some future date. Greengrass had once more tried to elicit from his prisoner Yakoob's whereabouts, but had failed. He learnt, however, that the five robbers who had attacked them during their chase after the outlaw had at the express command of Yakoob done so. Had it been left to them, they would have ridden off quietly and not risked an encounter; but Yakoob, as he swept by them as they lay concealed behind some rocks, their horses hid behind the hill, ordered them to mount and engage the enemy and so cover his flight. The robber said that Yakoob's face was covered with blood, for the bandage had slipped off the

wound on his head. He was very faint and would have soon been prisoner had it not happened that some of his band were near at hand.

There was one piece of news which somewhat cheered Mariepoor. Dr. Boyd, after his examination, pronounced Vincent's wound not to be dangerous. He remained at Mariepoor for two days only, for there was much sickness at his own station. Before leaving, however, he managed to recover Vincent from his unconscious state. A few days after this, Vincent gave an account of his fight with the robbers and how he saved himself and the house from being blown up. Mariepoor was quite proud of their doctor. He was always liked, but now he was thought a perfect hero. The meeting between him and Hoyles was warm as it was sad. Repeatedly did the major shake his hand and exclaim: "Bravely done! Bravely done!"

While the pair sat talking, Vincent said to the major:

"Hoyles, I have a secret to tell you."

"A secret?"

"Yes. I have discovered who Devaki is and who is her father. Helen and she are sisters."

Hoyles started from his seat.

"Who told you?" he asked.

"Devaki's nurse."

Hoyles sank back into his seat again.

"I learnt this secret but the other day myself. God! why did I not know of this before? But do you know where *he* is?"

"Whom do you mean?" asked Vincent with some surprise.

Hoyles paused before replying.

"I—I mean Yakoob," he stammered.

"How can I?"

"Of course not. How stupid of me. And you learnt that Devaki and Helen were sisters. And their father?"

Vincent looked at him for a second and then replied:

"I know all—everything. *You* are their father."

Hoyles made no answer. After a little while, he asked, to change the subject:

"You say you are sure that one of the men who attacked you was 'Jingling John.'"

"Quite."

"What a scoundrel he is! Do you know what my idea is of how the attacks on my house and Jaggoonath's were conducted?"

"No."

"First of all, Helen was carried off. She was sent away at once under a strong escort, while John and Yakoob went and murdered Jaggoonath and plundered his house. Then the pair returned to blow up my house and there encountered you. Their object, I imagine, was this, to make me believe that Helen had perished in the ruins."

"You have followed them correctly, I think. Did not Greengrass' servant say that two men passed him on horseback?"

"Yes. And those two were Yakoob and John. Jones must have dropped upon the robbers before Helen was carried off. If that man had had the least bit of pluck in him Helen would have been saved!" cried Hoyles bitterly. "There were enough men left in barracks to rout the robbers, and a five minutes' run would have brought him to the guard house, and in five minutes more the guard would have been at my house. He had no pluck to dash forward. He turned tail like a whipped cur and ran down the road to your place. I do feel inclined to give him a sound thrashing for his cowardly behaviour."

"When did he leave my place—do you know?"

"I have not the faintest idea. Most probably in the morning. I suppose he has sent a long account of this affair to his paper, the *Bombay Gup*. Well, I hope he has not set me or Greengrass up to ridicule. If he has, it will not be well for him. I'll not let him off as easily as did Greengrass some time back. But, look here, Vincent, I am keeping you awake. You are feeling tired, are you not?"

"No; I had a good night's rest."

"Well, I hope to see you about again."

"I wish that change too. Lying here, doing nothing, makes me think a great deal, and I must say the thoughts I have are not conducive to my health. I must do something, I fear, or I shall go mad."

"Don't talk like that, man. Look at me: have I too not suffered?"

"You have, and yet you bravely bear your losses."

"And you try to do the same. Get well soon, and we'll soon find Helen and Devaki."

"God grant we shall!" earnestly prayed Vincent.

Hoyles went home very troubled in mind. "Soh!" said he. "One, at least, knows my secret—at least a good portion of it. Well, what must I do? Let matters remain as they are or confess all? But what good will there be, in telling the secret? I shall be called a cruel father if I do. No, no. I'll let matters remain as they are now. Things fit in so beautifully too that no one will suspect. It was lucky for me the old nurse knew not the whole secret."

Hoyles, instead of going home, called on the collector to find out if he had heard anything fresh. There were a number of persons gathered there. Besides father and daughter, Greengrass and Shilstone were present and Macbay was just leaving. Hoyles stopped to ask how his wife was faring.

"Much better," replied Macbay. "I took the opportunity, you know, of calling Dr. Boyd in when he was here."

"I am glad to hear she is so much better," answered Hoyles. "By-the-bye, who are all those people inside there?"

Macbay told them, then added:

"There is a treat in store for you: Jones' long article, entitled 'A Shameful Outrage,' is being read. I'll not tell you more, but I'm sure you will be highly amused when you hear what you will. I'm just going off to give my wife the *Gup*. Ta—ta!"

"Hullo! Here is Hoyles," shouted Mr. Shallowford. "Here is something for you to read. Hullo! Where has the paper disappeared to?"

"Grace has taken it up to Mrs. Shallowford," answered Shilstone.

"Ho, Kate!" shouted out the collector to his wife. "Here is Mr. Hoyles, and he would like to read that famous article, if you have done with the *Bombay Gup*."

Mrs. and Miss Shallowfield soon made their appearance.

"Ah, Mr. Hoyles," said the elder of the two ladies, "I have to express my great sorrow for the loss you have sustained. I know what you must feel, for I can picture what my misery would be did I lose my daughter."

"I pray that you will never experience so great a loss," said Hoyles, the colour in his face fading.

"Let Mr. Hoyles see the paper, dear," said Mr. Shallowford, who was not anxious to witness a "touching" scene.

Mrs. Shallowford handed Mr. Hoyles the paper, and while he read column after column of it, his changing features of disgust and wrath were eagerly watched by the others in the room. Now he came to a paragraph where Jones recounted his "personal experiences of that most awful of awful nights." It ran thus:

"It was late, and I was jogging it home, using 'Shanks' mare' to carry me there, when, nearing Major Hoyles' house, I saw several suspicious-looking men creep into that gentleman's compound. The thought that suggested itself to me first was to rush in, heedless of my life, to Miss Hoyles' rescue. But then my good old father's saying came to my mind, about discretion being the better part of valour. So I turned and ran back to Mr. Vincent's bungalow, where I hoped to meet my friends, Messrs. Macbay and Shilstone, who I had heard were nursing our doctor, who was very ill. (N.B.—He is not out of danger yet. In fact his life is despaired of.) I was unfortunate. Neither of the gentlemen were with Mr. Vincent. They had gone home, because Vincent was much better. The doctor, ill as he was, on hearing what I had to tell him, rushed off to fight the robbers. My first impulse was to follow him, then I thought I should be doing more good by remaining behind and looking after the doctor's house during his absence. It was well I did. For, about half-an-hour after the doctor had left, I, while sitting in an easy-chair, saw the face of a man at the window. I rushed out to give chase to him, when lo! a dozen came at me. Had I but had a sword or a revolver in my hand I would bravely have faced the whole lot, but I was unarmed; and remembering what my dead father always told me about discretion, I—I blush to say it—showed the robbers a clean pair of heels. I fairly outpaced them. I made for Major Hoyles' house, to help Vincent, but when I was yet far from it, I branched off and made my way to my own house, for it struck me that the doctor could not be still in the major's house, but that he was either dead—killed, I should say—or in safety in somebody's house, &c. &c. &c."

"Did any of you ever read such *gallimatia* before?" asked Hoyles with disgust.

"Such confounded lies, you mean," growled Greengrass.

"There is another little story which we heard last night, Mr. Hoyles, which bears a strange resemblance to Jones' 'personal experiences,' and yet it differs, too, in many respects from the

article you have just read. My dear," said the collector to his wife, "kindly give the story you heard last night."

After much laughing on the part of Mrs. and Miss Shallowford, the elder of the two said:

"My *ayah*, Mr. Hoyles, is the wife of Luxshimun, Mr. Vincent's servant. Well, last night, my *ayah* came to me, and in great trouble asked me if her husband could be put in prison. 'What for?' I asked. 'Ah, he has gone and done such a dreadful thing,' moaned the woman. 'And, *Mem Sahib*, instead of Luxi seeing the heinousness of his offence, he laughs as if the affair were a great joke. *Mem Sahib*, will you——?'

"How can I," interrupted I, 'if you will not tell me the nature of his trouble?' And she replied:

"I don't like to tell you. All I desire to know is whether my husband will get punished."

"*Ayah!*" I exclaimed, 'don't be so stupid. Suppose, now, I were to say to you that I was in great trouble, and asked you to advise me—what would be your reply? Would you not ask what the trouble was?'"

"The *ayah's* mind became enlightened now and she told me how——" And Mrs. Shallowford told Hoyles how Luxshimun chased and captured Jones. We will not repeat the story, as the reader is already acquainted with it.

Hoyles did laugh. For a moment he forgot his sadness and laughed as he had never done before. In a little while his mood changed again, and he grew angry at the thought of Jones' cowardly behaviour. The whole of the company in the room then began to call Jones ugly names, such as: "Liar!" (by the men); "The wretched story-teller" (by the ladies); and by all, "The great coward."

Jones soon learnt, for women cannot keep their tongues from wagging, who his "robbers" turned out to be. He grew ashamed of himself and shunned society. By-and-bye, however, Mariepoor pitied him—for Mariepoor was very charitable in those days—and Jones entered society again, and never once after this did he write lies to the *Bombay Gup*.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CHARLES EDWARDS' PHOTO.

VINCENT made rapid progress towards recovery. In less than a week's time he was able to sit up in bed, and in eight days more he was at his own home again. Impatient though he was to be doing something towards the recovery of Devaki and Helen, yet he knew—for he was a doctor—that if he attempted to carry out any plan he had formed, in his present weak state he would be compelled to leave it unfinished; so he judiciously abstained from doing anything till he had rested—I should say, till his body had rested. For his mind there was none. Thought after thought coursed through his head, suggesting this and that way of recovering the girls. But plan after plan of his fell to the ground, for at the completion of each, in his mind, a difficulty always presented itself: where was the robber's stronghold? That question no one could answer, and until it was, nothing could be done.

Thoughts like these were coursing through his mind one day, when visitors were announced by his servant, and Macbay and Shilstone made their appearance. After inquiring after his health, Macbay informed Vincent that Hoyles had set out with some soldiers, intending to penetrate the forest, where, he thought, in some hill or other, Yakoob was.

"But," said Vincent, "that was not the direction in which Yakoob rode when chased by Hoyles and the other two."

"True," answered Macbay. "Yakoob steered due east, but it is Hoyles' opinion he did this to throw them off the scent."

"Quite likely. Well, I hope Hoyles will capture him. I suppose you have heard what Devaki is to him."

"No," answered both men.

"Perhaps he does not wish me to tell," said Vincent, thinking.

"Well, it strikes me," said Shilstone, "that he does mean you to. The other day, at Shallowford's, he told us that he had lost more than we dreamt of. He would not explain, telling us he would leave another to do that for him."

"Then he must mean me to break the news."

"I think so."

"Then listen. Devaki is his daughter."

"What!" exclaimed both men.

"Do you remember," asked Vincent, "the story he told us, one morning, about a friend of his marrying a beautiful Hindoo girl?"

"And both his wife and daughter being carried off while he was in Bombay? . . . Yes, I remember the story," acknowledged Shilstone.

"And I, too," replied Macbay.

"Well," continued Vincent, "Hoyles and that 'friend' are *one and the same person*."

"I can't understand that," said Macbay. "Hoyles lost his wife—Helen's mother—about twelve years ago. It was the other day only that I was reading the tablet erected to her memory by him in our graveyard. It says there that they were 'separated after a happy married life of thirty-eight years.' It appears from this, therefore, that Mrs. Hoyles was living when the major married the Hindoo—which is impossible."

Macbay discovered too late the mistake he had made. Vincent, white as a sheet, lay back on the couch and covered his face with his hands.

"Vincent—old boy!" exclaimed Macbay. "What have I said? What have I done?"

The doctor withdrew his hands from his face and tried to smile—but it was a very ugly smile.

"This is what you have done," answered Vincent. "You have deepened the mystery, and proved that Hoyles is a villain and a liar!"

"Nay, I don't think so," said Shilstone. "That is, I don't think any one in Mariepoor can say that they know him to be otherwise than a gentleman. He may have married his second wife thinking the other one dead. It is not at all likely his parents, who were dead against his marrying the Hindoo girl, would have sat quietly and not made an exposure, or at least threatened one. Besides, we know how strict Hoyles is on questions of morality."

"Your last defence of him does not hold good," replied Macbay. "It does not prove that at one time in his life Hoyles was not a blackguard—mind you, I am not saying he was one. It has often happened that a man, though an out and out scoundrel when young, turns truly pious when he grows older, and he spends his life preaching against that sin which he himself had frequently committed when young. Take, for instance, a present case:

that of Jones. He, till lately, told lies without number, but now he is warning us all not to fall into the habit. He is no hypocrite. He has seen the folly of his sin, and now has started a crusade against it, and is doing his level best to prevent people falling into this sin, which, from experience, he knows is to be eschewed."

"Bravo, Macbay!" exclaimed Shilstone. "You ought certainly to have been a *padri*."

But Vincent said nothing. He was thinking. He determined, as soon as he was well, to look thoroughly into the matter and question Hoyles, if he found it necessary, to clear up the mystery. He was not long in getting well again; and as soon as he was able, he went down to the graveyard and there read for himself the inscription on the tablet erected to Mrs. Hoyles' memory. It was as Macbay said. Mrs. Hoyles and her son went down in the ship "Retriever," when crossing over to America, just *ten* years before. And he read also: "After a happy married life of upwards of thirty-eight years." Vincent turned away, disturbed in mind, and was slowly walking down the gravel path, when he caught sight of the Rev. Mr. White, standing, with hat off, by the grave of Edwards. The minister gripped the hand of Vincent and shook it silently; he was afraid to speak. At length he said:

"I am glad to see you well again. Only last night I returned from one of my long visits to the stations up north. I left Mariepoor smiling in all its happiness, and now I see it weeping. I have heard, too, of your gallant fight and—and of your——"

He could not finish the sentence. His fingers tightened around Vincent's hand, and he gulped down something that had choked his words. Vincent, too, for some minutes was speechless; then in a broken voice thanked the good clergyman for feeling so much for him in his bereavement. Mr. White linked his arm in Vincent's and led him away from the graveyard. They walked on in silence, each busy with his own thoughts, till Mr. White's house was reached. Here Vincent intended leaving his companion, but Mr. White took him inside and made him take tea with him.

Mr. White had brought from the graveyard a withered wreath of flowers, and as now it lay on the table, Vincent took it in his hand.

"You recognize it, don't you?" asked Mr. White.

"I can't say I do."

"I took it off Edwards' grave."

"And whose kind hand placed it there—yours?"

"No—not mine. The same hand that has put many another there."

"You are exciting my curiosity."

"Helen put this wreath there."

"Helen!"

"Yes. I surprised her one day when she was in the act of decorating the grave, and she then told me that since the day she heard from you the story of Edwards' death, she had regularly been placing flowers on his grave."

"I remember the poor fellow. Did he tell you with what object he visited Mariepoor?"

"No. He was about to, then thought better of it and kept silence."

"Poor fellow! I wonder if he came to seek any one here?"

"I have an idea he did. That's his photo—the one against the wall there. He gave it to me when—Hullo! What is the matter with you? Why do you stare so?"

"His photo! Where have I seen that before? Ha, of course! That is Major Hoyles."

"Major Hoyles! Surely you don't think that resembles him!"

"Oh, yes, it does, if you examine it narrowly. The major must have looked like that when he was young."

"There is something—but very, very little—of the major's face in that. The lines of it are so feminine, contrasting greatly with the strength portrayed in Hoyles' face. But why bother about the major? The young man who died gave it me, and he said it was his. Besides, can't you recall the likeness between Edwards' face and that?"

Vincent stared at the photo. At length he exclaimed:

"Heavens, I do! Now I know why the photo seemed familiar to me when it was shown to me."

"Shown to you?"

"Yes, and quite recently too. I shall go mad, sir; go mad!"

Mr. White did not understand these strange symptoms Vincent was exhibiting. He was a student of human nature. He could tell at once, cloak it as you might, whether you were angry or in pain. He watched narrowly the wave-like motions of the

veins in Vincent's face—but could not discover what was the matter with him. Despairing of being able to discover the reason of so peculiar a change in Vincent's manner, he asked :

"Doctor, what is the matter with you? One moment you look angry; then a puzzled look comes into your eyes; this gives place to one of—how can I describe it? Sort of tired, wearied look. What is it, doctor?"

"I cannot tell you now, sir; but I will as soon as my way looks clear before me. How could you tell that I was troubled?"

"By the various expressions in your eyes and face I have just told you of. As a rule, I can guess correctly what the matter is, but not the cause. But the changes in your face were so varied that I was unable to guess whether it was pain or trouble that you were feeling. But you have asked me not to question you, so I will abide your time."

"Thank you, sir. I'll tell you—perhaps this evening, perhaps to-morrow. I can fix no time till I have seen Major Hoyles; but tell you, I promise I will."

"I'm satisfied. To tell you the truth, you have roused my curiosity. It is a sin to be inquisitive, and the sin is magnified when it is a priest who bends the knee to it. But I am a son of Eve and therefore heir to her nature. But I will put a constraint on myself and abide your time. Are you going?"

"Yes. I must have it out with Hoyles at once."

"That's it. The sooner the better—no matter what it is. 'Never put off till to-morrow, &c.,' is an aphorism I believe in; be it either in social matters or spiritual. Many a soul has been lost by putting off repentance till the morrow. By-the-bye, to-morrow is Sunday, and I am going to celebrate the Holy Eucharist at the usual hour: you will be present, will you not?"

"Most certainly."

They shook hands, and then Vincent took up his hat and hurried away.

(To be continued.)

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By MRS. LODGE,

Author of "GEORGE ELVASTON," etc.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ALEX CAMERON hailed his appointment under the Universal Colonization Company as a way of escape out of a most painful and unpleasant dilemma.

He at once began to hasten on the preparations for his departure, and soon became so busily engaged that he had no time to think of anything else but the business in hand.

In this, as in all else, Alex was thorough in his purpose. What he took in hand he gave his whole mind to for the time being.

The gold craze had not bitten him ; he kept his head cool and his judgment clear on that and all other matters connected with his African expedition.

He saw, what the baron professed to see, the great want of the age, and meant as far as lay in his power to remedy it. He well knew that there were thousands of well-educated young men just entering on life, who knew not which way to turn to earn a living, much less a competence : young men full of life and energy, not at all inclined to a frivolous life of idleness, but who perforce were obliged to stand idly by because no suitable employment offered or could be found, after the most diligent and unwearied search.

A life of adventure is the dream of many a school-boy, and often that dream continues far into early manhood ; to such this scheme of universal colonization held out an especial inducement. Tired of enforced idleness and their old way of life, they hailed the expedition headed by Alex Cameron somewhat after the enthusiastic manner of the youth of the middle ages who followed Peter the Hermit to Palestine.

As a rule a young Englishman dislikes a life of inactivity above all things. He rushes into any kind of mischief rather

than sit at home with folded hands, or dawdle away his time in useless rambles, without aim or purpose.

Alex decided from the first not to take more than sixty young men under his command : had he decided on taking six hundred he would have found double that number ready to enlist in the company's service, and follow their leader to the uttermost parts of the habitable globe.

Much against his will he was obliged to refuse hundreds of eager candidates, who would willingly have joined the expedition without present, fee or reward, solely trusting to the future either to make or mar their fortune in life.

The founding of a colony on the borders of Lake Ngami, as we have said, took immensely with a certain set of fashionable people, who seldom took any interest in things outside their own little world.

That Lake Ngami was far away beyond the borders of civilization added a special charm to the enterprise. Needy ne'er-do-well younger sons and impecunious cousins once sent there would be as unlikely to come back as though they had gone to that bourn from which no traveller e'er returns.

Not that any one ever gave utterance to such unchristian sentiments ; on the contrary, they one and all declared that going to the Cape was nothing more than a delightful summer excursion, and a visit to Lake Ngami an exciting extension of the journey.

What a lovely spot the Lake Ngami would become, when once the skill and enterprise of civilized man had raised a city on the surrounding plains.

Then the pious sisterhood bethought themselves that the city of Ngami would prove a most desirable centre for mission work.

Churches must, as a matter of course, be erected. A bishop would be required to lead the flock, and no end of fledgeling reverends would follow in his train.

Here was a field for missionary enterprise ! The pious sisterhood seized on it with unaccustomed zeal, and ere long another society sprang into existence for clothing and converting the Bakwain and Bechuana Hottentots.

It never entered the heads of the fair sisterhood that they would be considered as spoilers and intruders by the poor benighted Hottentots they were so zealous to clothe and convert to their own way of thinking. As to making them into cleanly Christian

citizens of the projected city of Ngami, it is just possible that not one of the would-be missionaries ever gave such an eventuality a thought.

Some of the ladies had an idea that the beautiful Zouga, as they were fond of calling it, was very like the Thames at Richmond in the time of the Saxon kings, and might be easily made into a delightful suburban retreat, where garden parties might be given and tea imbibed under the giant mowana and palmyra trees that adorn its banks.

However, as yet, the mission scheme was in its infancy, and could not by any means stand alone, therefore the Universal Colonization Company was looked to as the head and fount from which prosperity alone could flow into the many projected channels opening out to receive it.

It was rather hard at this time to determine which was the most popular man of the two, as both Alex Cameron and the baron were fêted and welcomed by all classes of society; the baron as the projector of the company, and Alex as the leader of the first contingent of gentlemen emigrants going out to Africa under the company's auspices.

On the whole perhaps Alex Cameron was the best liked, and certainly the most trusted.

Every one appeared to know that Alex was giving up a profitable and honourable career to sacrifice himself and his future prospects for the good of his fellow-man.

This was indeed philanthropy of the highest order, and the British public, both high and low, were not slow to appreciate it.

Once let a man establish a character for self-sacrifice and philanthropy, and he has the world at his feet like another conquering hero of the olden time.

And thus it was that Alex found himself in the full tide of popular favour.

He was flattered, feasted, memorialized and testimonialized to the full.

In a very little while he found himself overwhelmed with gifts of every description, from a tin of potted shrimps to a buffalo-hide portmanteau.

The amiable and pious sisterhood appeared to think that nothing would come amiss to the hero of the day, from a brass thimble to a portable cooking stove.

He received some score or more of travelling baths of all sorts and sizes, and enough towels and wraps to supply the whole contingent of gentlemen emigrants.

Of smoking caps, slippers, and a dozen other useless home-made articles that spinster ladies love to employ their spare moments on, he had enough to stock a modest emporium devoted to the sale of *decayed gentlewomen's* handiwork.

As to knitted woollen comforters, gloves, vests, hose and chest-protectors, besides a score of other articles for which Alex could find no use or name, he received at least half-a-ton weight ; the things were far beyond counting after the first week.

Then he received such long, long letters from gushing girls of uncertain age, who felt, so they declared, compelled to write him words of sympathy and encouragement in this more than noble undertaking ; they also expressed themselves as ready to follow his grand self-sacrificing example, should Providence ever open up the way for their feeble efforts to prove available. These gushing epistles generally contained a modest request to the effect that the writer would feel honoured by the gift of his photograph, cabinet size, signed by himself with his full name.

Then there were no end of letters from mothers, sisters and aunts, begging his interest for some unemployed youth whom they generally represented as a paragon of every virtue that youth is heir to.

To answer a tenth part of his unknown correspondents was utterly impossible ; in fact, after the first few days, most of the letters addressed in unfamiliar handwriting were consigned unopened to the waste-paper basket by his overworked clerks.

One day, however, a messenger arrived at the office with a small parcel and a letter, which he would only deliver into the hands of Alex Cameron himself.

The parcel contained a silver flask and drinking cup ; the letter was written in a delicate flowing hand that he remembered too well.

It was a sweet womanly letter, with a tone of sadness throughout that moved him strangely. A letter of farewell and good wishes, such as a sister might have written a much-loved brother. But there was no word of the past, of that past which had contained so much of happiness, and alas ! for Alex, of misery also.

And yet, the past, and the past alone, must have filled her heart

with bitter regret, when she wrote that sad letter of farewell to the man she had once professed to love with the most unselfish devotion. And what to him had once been—nay, still was—the fair writer of this farewell letter?

Ah, well; he had given her his whole heart's passionate devotion, and try as he would he could not now recall the gift.

His love for her had become entwined around his inmost being, like the clinging tendrils of the vine.

Looking at her letter and her gift, he forgot for the moment that it was her broken faith that had filled his soul with unrest, and sent him forth a wanderer over the face of the earth, with nothing to hope or to care for in the dreary future.

He only remembered how dear she had once been to him, filling his whole life with gladness; only knew that he loved her still, spite of her fickleness and falseness.

His lip trembled and his eyes filled with tears as he read and re-read her much-prized letter.

The letter and her gift he would treasure up as relics of the dead past. To forget was impossible, but there was no bitterness in his heart against the woman who had so wronged and betrayed him.

The popular voice had found no echo in his own breast. He knew quite well that love of his fellow-man was not the motive that urged him on to undertake a perilous journey beyond the boundary of civilization, and endure the privations and discomfort of travelling through the pathless desert or the deadly jungle, with hostile savage tribes on every hand, who only knew enough of the white man to fear and distrust him.

He was not even sanguine of eventually founding an English colony in the interior of Africa, but there would be plenty of perilous adventure and enough excitement and danger to suit his mood and take him out of himself. In short, he was a disappointed man, and it is often of such stuff that heroes are made.

He was getting heartily tired, too, of being made so much of. There was very little of philanthropy about the whole scheme; gain was at the bottom of it all, and in his calmer moments his heart smote him to think that he was lending himself to a popular deception.

However, he was not a man to draw back once he had put his hand to the plough, and what pluck and endurance could accomplish he would carry out at the peril of his life.

He told himself more than once, as he pressed his lips to that farewell letter, that he had nothing left to live for, that love and hope were things of the past; he had even lost faith in his integrity of purpose. Had he not been tried and found wanting.

Where was his resolve to do the right and fear no man; when the poor despised widow of his friend George Chineron had pleaded to him in vain for redress?

Ah, conscience will not always be silenced by sophistry; try as we may to persuade ourselves that we did it all for the best.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE time at length arrived for Alex Cameron to start on the expedition to the Cape.

He was heartily glad when he found all the arrangements for embarkation complete and a day fixed for himself and his young compatriots to leave England.

There were, however, some of his own affairs yet to arrange. He might not live to see his native land again, therefore it behoved him to put his house in order before he left home for, at least, an indefinite period.

He had not visited his chambers in the Temple for some weeks, and was quite prepared to find the place looking dingy and forsaken; the solitary old clerk, too, appeared more depressed and broken down than usual.

And well the poor old man might, seeing he had that lonely office all the week through to himself.

Merryman had grown too old for active employment, although he was still equal to the duties of a barrister's clerk, and Alex had found him most trustworthy in times past. He had, however, of late little else to do except answer inquiries and direct clients to the chambers occupied by a barrister whom Alex had ostensibly taken into partnership.

"I'm afraid you find it rather dull here," said Alex kindly when he noted the old clerk's depressed air. "How will you manage all alone by yourself during my long absence from England?"

"I'm used to the place, sir," he replied with an air of painful dejection; "I don't mind being alone, but it's having nothing to do that makes the time hang heavy on my hands."

"Ah, in that case we must see to it. You shall not be left to

wear your heart out in idleness. There's plenty of copying work required by the firm. What do you say to copy work, Merryman? Might make a pound a week extra by that, you know."

"Well, sir, for that matter I'd be quite willing to do copying work for the firm without any extra pay; it's very good of you, sir, to keep me on here, and I don't care to eat the bread of idleness, old as I am."

"Oh, pooh! I couldn't trust any one like you to look after things, you know, so I'm glad you'll stay on, as I don't want to shut up the place altogether. I've some valuables that will be safer here than in a warehouse. But as to the copy work, you must be paid at the proper rate; there's no end of engrossing to be done. The firm shall give you the preference. I'll not forget to make this arrangement to-morrow at latest."

The old clerk's face brightened. "I'll be happy enough in that case, sir. I rather like being alone when I've writing to do."

"That's settled, then," said Alex rather absently; "and now follow me into my room. I have something to entrust to your care."

"There's a pleasant outlook from this room, and it's lightsome and warm, too," remarked Merryman, as he seated himself where a ray of sunlight streamed over the uncarpeted floor.

Alex smiled sadly; he remembered when he thought this room the cheeriest and most cosy sanctum in the world.

What day-dreams he had indulged in, lazily smoking his choice havana and gazing dreamily out on the swift-flowing river, so full of life and motion. What joyous home scenes he had weaved and peopled with his heart's idols. What a bright unclouded future he had pictured to himself, many a time and oft, with one central figure always in the foreground.

Now all was changed, the room looked cheerless and deserted, his day-dreams had found a sad awakening, his idols were laid low even in the dust, his future home might be the desert and his grave some torrent bed.

A sudden thought appeared to strike him. "Would you like to occupy my chambers during my absence?" he asked.

The old clerk looked up uneasily, his eyes travelled slowly round the room until they fell on the dark stain which had found a way through the carpet and dyed the floor indelibly.

"You are very good—very kind, sir," he said hesitatingly, like

one fearful of giving offence, "but I have a nice snug little home up Islington way, very humble, sir, but quiet and clean, and the walk does me good, sir, being alone all day. I can look out on the green fields from my window, and Sundays are never dull in the country. When I do not come to the office I ramble through Highgate Woods ; sometimes I go on through Finchley to Barnet —beautiful country roads all the way, sir."

Alex looked at the old man attentively as he rambled on about the country delights of Northern London, and noted how forlorn and shabby he looked ; his thin grey hair and wrinkled brow spoke of trial and patient endurance ; and yet how little Alex knew of the life of this man who for years had served him faithfully and well.

"Oh, I only mentioned the thing, thinking you might like it, and it would save you your rent," he said when the old man paused and looked deprecatingly at him. "But of course I know it's more cheerful in the suburbs, and then you have your household gods, too, around you. What family have you?"

A pink flush dyed the old man's withered cheek as he coughed softly behind his hand.

"I'm all alone, sir," he answered, with a quaver in his voice and a slight quiver of the pale lips. "I've never been rich enough to ask a lady to bear my name and share my lot."

Something like a smile gathered round the lips of Alex and lit up his eye.

The flush in Merryman's cheek grew deeper as he went on with surprising spirit for him. "You see, sir, I could not ask a common person to be my wife, however much I might wish for female companionship. My mother was daughter of a dean and my father vicar of Ploughton for over twenty years. I came of a good family, but then I was always quiet and shy even when a boy. My mother used often to say, 'Horace will never rise in the world ; he wouldn't get on in any profession for want of spirit and proper pride. If we brought him up to take holy orders he'd never be anything but a curate if he lived to see his hundredth birthday.' When a man is not born to greatness there's little use his having a lofty spirit. I've never repined at my lot, sir. God has fitted the back to the burden."

"Never repined at his lot!"

Alex Cameron felt the rebuke, although the old decayed clerk

had little meant to administer either reproof or admonition to his employer, whom he admired, nay, more, loved, as a man would love the son of his most valued friend. "Never repined at his lot!" This poor underpaid pinched old clerk, without wife or child, possibly without kith or kin left who cared to own this decayed spiritless septuagenarian.

Alex looked at him with increased interest not unmixed with respect.

Until to-day he had not exchanged a dozen words with Horace Merryman, except on business matters, during the ten years or more he had been his clerk, and he knew as little of his domestic life and antecedents until now as he would have done of the chance acquaintance of yesterday.

Yet he placed the most implicit faith in the old man's integrity and was about to confide a secret to his keeping that he would not have confided to the dearest and most trusted friend of his youth.

"And so you live all alone?" said Alex, not quite knowing how to draw the old man out and gain some insight into his private life with a view to helping him if it lay in his power. "Have you any brothers alive? I think I've met a clergyman of your name somewhere."

"Oh, that must have been Anthony; he was curate down Stepney way when I first came to London; he's dead—died of fever caught in one of the slums. He hadn't any proper pride either, so he never rose in the church; he died at forty-five, a poorer man even than myself."

"And now you are all alone, I suppose?" ventured Alex, hoping to hear more of his family history.

"I'm the last of eight, sir. I've nephews and a niece somewhere, but you see they don't care to look up an old uncle from whom they haven't the least expectations."

"You must be rather lonely, I should think, living all by yourself."

"Well, I'm used to it, sir, and I'm not quite alone either; they are very genteel people I live with: Mr. Limber is a clerk like myself; his wife is a very accomplished lady, gives music and singing lessons, and has an 'at home' once a fortnight. I have my own rooms, but I breakfast and take tea with the family, and on Sundays dine at their table; quite a genteel dinner, joint and sweets, with cheese and dessert after."

"Why, you are quite tip-top, Merryman; it must cost you something to live so genteelly," said Alex, quite amused and not a little interested.

"Well, yes, sir," replied the old clerk, drawing himself up with more "proper pride" than one would have given him credit for. "I pay ten shillings a week for my rooms and a shilling for attendance; that with meals brings it up to a pound, but then Mrs. Limber is very polite and attentive, and takes care that I'm made comfortable; quite genteel and home-like, you know, sir."

"You cannot have saved much out of your salary at that rate," said Alex, wondering what sort of breakfast and tea, let alone dinner on Sundays, the accomplished Mrs. Limber provided for Merryman at nine shillings a week.

The old clerk shook his head and looked rather downcast. "No, not much, sir, but then I don't owe anything, and I'm not past work."

"Past work! No, no, not a bit of it!" replied Alex cheerily. "Why, you'll nearly double your salary if you do copy for the firm. I'll take care they pay you full price; it's not every one can write such a fine clerkly hand as you, Merryman."

"I try to do my best, sir," answered the old man with a little deprecating cough. "But what can I be doing for you, sir? I couldn't take my hundred a year to sit here and do nothing on your account—it wouldn't be fair, sir."

"Oh, as to that, you have to keep the place open, you know, and send me word of all that goes on, besides forwarding me my letters. But now pay attention to what I am about to say, and, mind, I am intrusting you with a great secret—a secret that I would not intrust to the keeping of any other man alive."

The old man shifted on his chair and looked rather uneasy:

"You do me honour, sir, but——."

"There—there, don't interrupt me," cried Alex, cutting him short. "I know I can trust you; the secret does not concern me personally, but all the same you must not mention it to a living soul except to the person whom it vitally concerns. Do you remember little Freda?"

"Little Freda!" echoed the old clerk, with an air of astonishment. "Of course I remember Trimble's little girl, and a very pretty child she is too, but I haven't seen her for a long time, not since Christmas, certainly. What's become of her, I wonder? She

used to run in and out the office quite friendly like till about Christmas, when she stopped coming all on a sudden."

Alex informed the clerk that Freda had been ill, but how to tell him that she was not the gate-porter's daughter, for the moment puzzled him sorely. He did not want to take Merryman into full confidence, only let him know as much of the painful affair as would serve to guide him in carrying out the task he was about to assign him.

"It has come to my knowledge," he began, after a pause, in which he took time to weigh over the words best suited to reveal the startling fact of Freda's parentage, "that the little girl you have seen in my chambers is not the daughter of David Trimble but of——Oh, well, you don't know the person who claims to be her mother, but you may have seen a tall dark woman going in and out of Trimble's lately."

Merryman shook his head, he had no remembrance of seeing such a person—Was that dark woman the mother of Freda?

Alex nodded assent; then he again felt at a loss how to proceed; he shrank from telling his clerk that the tall dark woman was the widow of the young nobleman who had committed suicide in the room they now sat in, and that poor little despised Freda was heiress to vast estates.

So hard did he find it, learned and astute as he was, to make the action he had taken in the matter appear honourable and straightforward in the eyes of his clerk.

Would not the question naturally arise, that having the facts in his possession, for what purpose he had kept them back from their rightful owners?

However, what he said to the clerk was, that he had been entrusted with a pocket-book to deliver to the tall dark woman, who was Freda's mother; that the woman and child had disappeared, and although he had caused the most diligent inquiries to be made he could, as yet, gain no tidings of their whereabouts. Therefore, as he was about to leave England, he had decided to give this pocket-book into his, the clerk's, keeping, that he might give it into the hands of the rightful claimant. But until that person came to claim it he must not leave it out of his possession for an instant; indeed he was not to mention that he had charge of the pocket-book to a living soul, as there were documents of

great value in the book, and there might chance to be others who would give a great deal to get possession of its contents.

"But how am I to identify the claimant? there are a great many tall dark women in London," said Merryman, looking rather bewildered; "and, pardon me, sir, but I don't think you have mentioned the woman's name."

"Ah, that was an oversight; but see here is the pocket-book sealed up and addressed to the person into whose hands you are to deliver it. Mrs. Trimble knows the woman well; indeed, she is engaged at this present time in trying to discover where she is, that she may inform her that by calling at No. 7, Elm Court, she will hear of something to her advantage. Mrs. Trimble does not know what it is, and you are not on any account to tell her. You are simply to hand it to the rightful owner without any comment or remark."

It was somewhat odd, but Alex Cameron never could induce himself to call the widow of the late Lord Chineron by name. He had addressed the pocket-book to Mrs. Alice Mathers, but in all his conversation with the clerk he had merely designated her as "that woman."

"You can read the address," he said, pushing the packet towards him; "and please remember that a great deal depends on your delivering it safely into her hands. For security I will lock it up in the small iron safe behind the book-case. That safe is so well concealed that the cleverest thief would fail to find it. There are two keys to the lock. I intend keeping one and giving the other into your care; and mind, I charge you never to leave that key lying about. It will be safest, I think, to carry it on your person."

As Alex spoke his back was turned on the clerk. He had risen and opened the book-case, at the back of which, hid by books, was a small knob or button. When he pressed this knob the book-case opened like a door, disclosing an iron safe laid in the wall.

"This, I think, is a safe hiding-place enough for anything," said he, turning around and reaching out his hand to take up the pocket-book.

It was then he noticed that the old man looked deadly pale, and his hands trembled nervously.

"Are you ill?" asked Alex in alarm. "Here, drink this,"

nanding him a glass of wine, "and if you do not feel better I will run for the nearest doctor."

The old clerk swallowed the wine and drew a long breath, but he was still deadly pale, and did not speak until Alex made a stride towards the door, with the evident intention of at once seeking medical aid.

Then he stretched out his hand, saying, in a quavering voice, quite unlike his usual utterance :

"Pray don't go for a doctor, sir. It is nothing but a passing weakness. I shall soon be all right ; the wine has revived me already."

Alex hesitated. The old man's hands were trembling, and his face showed no sign of colour.

"Are you often taken like this?" he asked with some anxiety.

"I never felt like it before in my life, sir ; but then it's two hours past my dinner-time, and—and I'm not so strong as I used to be ; but I'm all right now."

"How thoughtless of me," exclaimed Alex ; "it's past three o'clock. You must be famished if you have had nothing since breakfast. Here, take another glass of wine and a biscuit, then go to dinner without delay."

The old clerk drank the wine, but declined to eat, and, after a few minutes, rose up, without a word more being said by either, and left the room, closing the door behind him.

On reaching his own dark corner in the outer office he sat down on his office stool and looked about him like a man quite dazed and bewildered.

"Alice Mathers ! Alice Mathers ! Did I hear aright ? Can it be possible that Alice, my long lost Alice, is the mother of Freda ?

"Yes, he said Alice Mathers. Poor Alice ! poor Alice !" he kept on repeating softly to himself, rubbing, or rather wringing, his hands, whilst tears trickled unheeded down his aged cheeks and fell on the time-worn desk before him.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ALEX was busy, and soon forgot all about the old clerk's sudden indisposition ; in fact, the very existence of the poor old man himself, until, after a preliminary knock, Merryman came in to

announce that a lady was in the outer office asking to see Mr. Cameron.

"What name did she give?" he asked, instantly concluding that it was the dark gaunt woman who sought an interview, and curious to know by what name she had announced herself.

"She declined to give her name, sir. She appears quite a lady; very young, and with the sweetest voice I ever listened to."

"Indeed!" ejaculated Alex, elevating his eyebrows. "Well, for all you say in her favour, I must trouble her to send in her name. I never grant professional interviews unless——"

But here he broke off abruptly and started to his feet. A tall graceful figure was standing in the doorway closely veiled.

Merryman rubbed his hands and smiled in a subdued sort of way as he backed himself noiselessly out of the room.

The lady raised her veil and held out her hand to Alex, with a wan smile on her trembling lips.

Alex took the outstretched hand with fervent pressure between his own, and held it there for some moments without uttering one word.

Then he led her to a seat and said something in an incoherent sort of way about the pleasure and the honour, and then he broke down hopelessly, his heart beating, his pulse throbbing, a strange sense of beatitude suffusing his whole being.

The lady was the first to speak. She began in a quiet, low voice, without any sign of emotion, to ask the very natural question, if he were not surprised to see her?

"Yes, I am certainly surprised," he replied, looking at the same time the joy he felt at sight of her fair face.

"Well, Alex——." How his heart thrilled at the old familiar word and tone; he quite forgot for one brief moment that they were nothing now to each other but friends at best. "Well, Alex, I heard you were about to leave England, and I came to say good-bye. I couldn't bear to think of your leaving home for so perilous a journey without seeing you."

Alex expressed his sense of her kind thoughtfulness rather awkwardly; he was gazing wistfully at her pale cheeks and her white thoughtful brow; she was lovely as of yore, but the careless, joyous expression of happy girlhood had entirely fled.

Her paleness was not of that sickly hue which tells its own

tale of hidden disease, and gives warning to prepare for an early ending to the petty cares and weak ambitions of this mundane state, but the soft creamy whiteness which the healthful cheek of youth assumes when sorrow lies heavy on the breast.

Her golden-brown hair seemed darker by contrast, and the pencilling of her brows and long silken eyelashes came out in bolder relief. Her large violet eyes, too, seemed darker and deeper, with a tender wistful expression in them that told of recent bereavement and ever-present sorrow.

She had that quiet subdued air of dignity which heart-felt sorrow gives, even to the most homely person.

How peerless she looked as she sat there in her plain morning attire. Alex thought he had never seen her look so lovely, so exquisitely simple and womanly.

He could have clasped her to his heart with a spontaneous burst of pure unalloyed trusting affection, have forgotten all the dreary past, and have given her once more a strong man's faith and worship.

True love such as Alex felt is all powerful. What is not a man ready to do and to dare for the woman he loves?

Once in the life of most men a pure grand passion dominates the heart, but sometimes, sad to relate, it mars the whole future, turning everything into bitterness that once was sweet and glad-some.

Many a cynical old bachelor who sneers at the tender passion remembers, with a sigh, the time when he would have bartered every other earthly good for the love of one fair gentle maid who passed him by for a far less worthy suitor. And much as that old bachelor may sneer at love, he treasures the memory of that one green spot in his otherwise loveless existence.

In after years Alex too might sneer at the sight of some fond youth caught in love's toils; but the memory of that brief half-hour spent in his dismantled dreary chambers would remain graven on his heart for aye.

And yet no word of love passed his lips; he simply sat in the same room with the woman he adored, and drank in every tone of her voice, as the thirsty traveller drinks in the cool refreshing water from some desert well.

She told him that she also was about to leave England. Her

mother's health appeared broken, and change of scene and climate was the only remedy the faculty could prescribe.

Her mother had never recovered the shock of poor George's untimely death, and as she said this she started and looked around her with dilated eyes and suspended breath.

It was evident that she only then remembered she was sitting in the very apartment in which that fearful death scene occurred.

"Ah," she ejaculated, the tears welling up into her beautiful eyes. "Poor George ; poor dear fellow ! I cannot but think that he had some fearful weight of care on his mind that we little suspected. And yet he appeared to live very contentedly with Bertha, and was so proud of his boy.

"Bertha bears up wonderfully under her bereavement. I am afraid she is rather a cold-hearted woman. We, that is my sister and I, never did consider she cared much for poor George. Perhaps it was not much of a love-match on either side."

Alex listened intently to this latter statement. It had been his heartfelt pity for Bertha and her son that had, in part, kept him back from doing justice to Freda and her mother.

"I don't suppose you remember Alice Mathers," she went on ; "she was a sort of governess-companion in our family some years since ; she was a tall dark girl, with retiring manners. We used to think her rather simple, she was so easily imposed on, and had such faith in all around her. Poor George, odd as it seemed, fell desperately in love with her ; everybody noticed it, except mamma, and for once she was blind to what was going on in her very presence. Well, it all ended in nothing. Poor George went on foreign service, and Alice disappeared soon afterwards. Her mother died suddenly about that time, and Alice Mathers never came back to us after she left to attend her mother's funeral. There were some unpleasant rumours about her, and then we heard she was dead ; but somehow, I cannot help thinking that she was in some way mixed up with poor George's fearful act of self-destruction."

Alex started and looked her inquiringly in the face.

"Did the countess lead you to suppose such was the fact ?" he asked.

Lady Maud shook her head.

"I would not dare mention the name of Alice Mathers in my mother's presence ; she sits alone in the blue drawing-room

mostly, and seldom converses with any one. Not a member of the family dare speak to her of poor George since his death, and she never by any chance mentions his name; she is sadly changed and restless, and at times so irritable that she cannot bear the sound of any one's voice."

"Then why, may I ask, do you connect Alice Mathers with your brother's untimely death?" asked Alex, rather perplexed at the turn the conversation had taken.

"Well, it's rather a secret, and of course we do not wish it to get spread about; but some one told Lord Hardbend that poor George was seen to go away with a tall spectral-looking woman on that fatal night; and Fanny, who knew more about the affair between Alice and poor George than I did, says that she believes that tall spectral woman was Alice Mathers."

"And if that should prove to be the fact, would you feel inclined to hold out a helping hand to her?" he asked.

"As far as money would go, yes; one would not have her remain in want on poor George's account. Fanny says that he meant to marry her, but he dared not face our mother's anger; she dominated over him as well as every other member of her family; we no more dared to disobey her than if we were her slaves."

This last sentence was uttered somewhat bitterly and her lip trembled as she spoke.

Alex shivered as with a sudden chill. How many lives had that proud imperious woman shattered with her hand of velvet and grip of steel?

For a moment Alex felt inclined to take Lady Maud into his confidence. She had known Alice in the past; she had had some insight into her brother's feelings with regard to that much-wronged woman; had he known of the whereabouts, at that time, of Alice and her little daughter, he would have taken the young lady to them, and have left the poor friendless woman to tell her own tale to her dead husband's sister.

But a little reflection showed him how futile it would prove for her to know the wrong and burden her heart with this painful family secret.

She would most certainly incur her mother's displeasure, and possibly the enmity of her relatives, if she interfered in behalf of her brother's unacknowledged widow and his lawful heiress.

No, he decided not to tell her ; he would leave matters as they were.

Alice would be sure to turn up before long ; then Merryman could be trusted to place the pocket-book in her hands, leaving her to take what steps she thought fit to recover her rightful position.

"We are so sorry you are going so far away," she said after a pause, thus changing the topic of conversation, to the great relief of Alex, who feared, every moment, that by some incautious admission he might betray the secret he desired to keep from her knowledge. "I suppose there is no chance of your changing your mind at the last moment and throwing the whole thing up as a certain failure."

Alex assured her that he was too deeply pledged to draw back now, even had he wished, but that he had no desire to back out of the expedition ; on the contrary, he was glad that the day had been fixed for his leaving England.

Did he expect to remain long away ? she asked with a slight flush in her cheek and a decided hesitation in her voice.

He might be away for years, it was very uncertain. The climate was a trying one—he might never return at all—what did it matter ? He had no one to care for him that he knew of. That was the substance of his reply, uttered in a tone that he tried his best to render unfeeling and careless.

Before he had quite finished speaking she rose up and went to the window. There was a wistful, far-away look in her eyes, which soon became bedimmed with tears, that blotted from her view the swiftly-flowing river and the busy craft gliding ceaselessly over its rippling surface.

The scene on which she gazed, yet scarcely saw through her tears, was full of life and animation, strictly English in character, although the sky above was cloudlessly blue and the sun shone and sparkled on the rippling water, gilding it with golden sheen.

As she stood there Alex suddenly remembered how her brother's child had often looked forth from that same window : that gentle, beautiful child with the soft, wistful, dreamy blue eyes, who had often set him wondering at her strong resemblance to the woman now standing before him.

At length Lady Maud turned from the window, her eyes still soft and luminous with tears.

"I have often wished to see this room," she remarked ; "but how unlike the place I pictured it to be. I used to think of it as so homelike and cheerful, not desolate and deserted like this. Alas ! how different are life's realities to what we once fancied them."

"Oh, the place used to be habitable enough before—before it was dismantled. I've spent many happy hours here, happier by far than any I hope to spend again. You see a fellow don't care to rig out his chambers like a reception-room ; and after all, one's surroundings don't matter when one is full of life and hope and the world lies before him like a summer landscape without a cloud on the horizon."

"And now ?" she asked with her eyes turned away. "Life is not what—what we—that is, the world has grown harder, or we have grown wiser, and wisdom is seldom attained except through suffering."

He looked at her with yearning tenderness. She was so near and yet so far, very—very far removed from him, by a tie that honour forbade them both to cut asunder. Was she not pledged to be another man's wife ? A wide gulf had opened out between them, which could not be bridged over, even by the mighty love he bore her.

True she had once pledged her faith to him, but not openly and before the world. She had elected to throw him over for rank and wealth, and he was not the man to sue her favour knowing that.

She stood before him a few moments with bent head and slightly drooping form, then seemed about to add something to what she had already uttered ; she raised her head, opened her lips, then hesitated, but no words came ; she was evidently battling with some strong emotion to which she refused to yield.

After a few minutes' hesitation she turned to go without another word.

She went out slowly—lingered a little on the stairs—lingered yet a little longer when she gained the open court ; then went her way saddened in spirit, the words she meant to utter driven back on her heart.

Alex had walked by her side silent and half-expectant, of he knew not what, only that some wild hope had sprung suddenly into existence, making his heart beat painfully.

When they reached the Embankment she saw her carriage awaiting her.

It was with ill-concealed emotion that she held out her hand to him to say good-bye.

She let it rest in his for one brief moment, then sprang lightly into the low landau, and before he was well aware, he found himself standing alone on the pavement watching her out of sight.

Then a thought flashed across his brain that made him turn dizzy with sudden joy.

Did she love him still ?

Ah ! what if she did ? Was it not now too late ?

He resolutely put away the temptation from him and accepted the inevitable with a bitter sigh.

He had looked his last on the face he loved that day ; and what a gentle womanly face it was, a face that he hoped would visit him in his dreams and soothe his troubled sleep in the time to come, when his days might be full of weariness and disappointment.

(To be continued.)

Reminiscences of a Visit to India and China.

HOW WE GOT THERE AND HOME AGAIN.

PART II.

THE City of Bombay is undoubtedly one of the most striking places in the whole world. Until I went there I had no idea of the extreme beauty of its situation and its surroundings, and I felt glad that I had seen Calcutta previously or the latter would indeed have seemed poor, especially as it is the capital, after the splendour of the other town. All the public buildings, which are very grand and imposing, are of modern European construction, and I believe the native quarter is of the same. Although it may seem strange, these European edifices, with the brilliancy of the dress of the inhabitants, make a truly fine effect. No more splendid scene could be pictured than of an evening on the esplanade called the "Apollo Bunder," where all the Anglo-Indians gather in their well-turned-out barouches and native servants in picturesque liveries; the richest Parsees in their carriages too, with their pretty wives in lovely silk sarais; while others are on foot—their delicate tinted draperies fluttering in the breeze, which generally sprang up at that hour, and sellers of fruit and flowers of various religions and castes, each therefore wearing different sorts of turbans, only all of the brightest hues—would be moving about among the many vehicles; the whole spectacle overlooking the magnificent bay covered with shipping of all kinds—the sea a turquoise blue and the sky the same, without a cloud to be seen.

On arriving in Bombay, the governor, Lord Harris, kindly sent his carriage to meet us, pressing us to stay with him, but we asked to be allowed to defer our visit for a while, in order that we might be free to lionize the place first, which can be better done from an hotel than if on a visit to a friend.

The Parsees comprise a large portion of the population, so are in consequence a great feature of the city. The women are extremely good-looking, and their costumes both becoming and pretty, though the men are fat and plain, and the peculiar hats

they wear are rather ugly. Among the many curious sights are the "Towers of Silence," being the burial place of the Parsees, who leave there the bones of their dead, after first giving the remains to be devoured by vultures or other birds of prey, which seemed to me a most horrible idea ; yet there is a good deal to admire in their religion. They do believe in God, only consider He is represented by the sun, hence their reverence of the sun and treating all fire with veneration, as being sacred. Thus no Parsee ever smokes cigars or tobacco, as he would consider he was insulting the deity to use fire for pleasure, as fire and light being like the sun, indirectly represent God to him ; but he would use firearms in defence if necessary or for practising for defence. Therefore you see they do not look on the sun as God, as one often hears said of them, but as a symbol of the deity. I was told that the "Apollo Bunder" had been so named because the Parsees were the first to meet on that spot towards sunset, "Bund" being a term commonly used by the British in the East for a shore walk. There are three fire-temples for public worship in Bombay, open day and night. This fire goes through nine processes before it becomes sacred, and is always kept burning in the temples. God, according to the Parsee faith, is the emblem of glory and refulgence and the Almighty Fountain of Light ; this is why, when engaged in prayer, they are directed to stand before the fire or to turn their faces to the sun, because these appear to be the most proper symbols of the Almighty, and the best and noblest representatives of His deity.

This race came from Persia through the inducement of some English merchants while Bombay was still in the possession of Portugal, and shortly before it was acquired by Great Britain, as the dower portion of the Portuguese Princess Catherine on her marriage with Charles II. The name Parsee is derived from Pars, the province in Persia from which they came, Persepolis having been their capital. They have continually appealed to the British for protection from the persecutions of the Moham-medans, who were ever their implacable enemies, imploring our ambassadors successively for many centuries to intercede with the Shah on their behalf, as the persecutions carried against them in their native country were so cruel and bitter that actually they were more heavily taxed than any other of the inhabitants. At last, in 1882, through the exertions of England, life was made

more tolerable for those of their race who still remain in Persia. They are rapidly advancing in civilization and education ; this especially shows itself in the emancipation of the women in this generation. Formerly the latter were treated much like all women in the East, more as slaves than anything else, whereas now, particularly among the upper classes, they hold a more prominent position, and are well and carefully educated, even to music and painting in many cases.

We made the acquaintance of some extremely pleasing Parsees, who invited us to an entertainment at their villa in the suburbs. It was a charming house, close to the sea, well built, several stories in height, with verandahs to each floor and a most superb view from them. They invited the whole of their family to meet us, all of whom appeared except our host's old mother, who sent an apology that she did not feel equal to coming, with some pretty embroidery as a gift, which she had worked herself. The rest of the party consisted of our host's brother and his wife, his sister and her husband and our hostess' sister, besides one or two of their friends. All the ladies were in the loveliest Chinese silk sarais, one in a delicate mauve embroidered with silver, another in palest pink with pearl embroidery, another *eau-de-Nil* and silver, our hostess, the nicest of all, being pure white, embroidered with gold, and she was also the prettiest woman there, though all were good-looking. Her two children, a boy and girl, were very picturesque-looking, both dressed in soft white delicate silk crape. Each of these ladies wore English bronze shoes, the toes being tastefully worked to match their costumes. They told me that now they always get their shoes from London, as they find them so comfortable, and are able to get them embroidered to match their sarais. They further informed me that they send to China for the silks and crapes for their clothes.

We were most hospitably entertained with champagne, tea, Indian cakes and fruits of all sorts, as well as ice-cream. On bidding us good-bye they pressed us to accompany them to one of their weddings, which was to take place that evening, so we consented to do so ; they then put several large garlands on us, of white flowers such as stephanotis and tuberoses, after which they presented us with many souvenirs, among them with a most interesting and instructive history of their nation, their religion and their customs.

We returned to Bombay with those of the party who intended to be present at the marriage, which took place immediately after sunset, as all their weddings do, in a large hall kept especially for all their functions. Before entering this building some more large wreaths of sweet white flowers were placed on our shoulders ; we were then introduced to the father of one of the brides, for two couples were to be married ; he was very cordial and conducted us to the best seats allotted to his European friends in the inner hall. The centre of this saloon was covered with crimson cloth and railed off by a rope preparatory for the ceremony. Soon after we were seated the brides arrived, each accompanied by several girls, which seemed similar to our custom of bridesmaids, bearing baskets containing the marriage garments. The brides were then arrayed in the presence of all the guests in pure white silk sarais, beautifully embroidered with silver, over the plain white silk one they already wore ; finally the mother of each placed on their heads a wreath of white flowers and a garland of the same round the necks of both brides and bridegrooms. We were told that one of the two pairs belonged to the more advanced school of thought, while the other two were old-fashioned and therefore adhered rigidly to all the ancient queer customs connected with a wedding ; certainly some of their doings were very quaint, but both couples had raw twist wound round them seven times, then tied seven times over their joined hands, until each bride and bridegroom seemed thoroughly tied together, this being the symbol of the tying of the Gordian knot. After this the priest said the marriage service, and at the end delivered a long lecture on the respective duties of husband and wife. This sermon was given in modern Persian, so that all could comprehend it ; but the beginning of the service was said in old Persian, which is used for all religious purposes, although the Parsees of the present day generally only understand the former, which is a totally different language ; thus they are like the Roman Catholics and stick to the ancient tongue for their prayers and services.

During the discourse champagne and other refreshments were handed round to all the guests, which was rather reviving in the stifling heat caused by the myriads of lights and numbers of people, combined with the strong perfume from the quantities of heavily-scented flowers and the thermometer registering nearly 100 degrees in the shade, as it did just then at midday in Bombay.

At this moment, finding the long ceremony was practically over, we gladly slipped out into the fresh air again ; our host of the villa and the bride's father perceiving this followed us and showed us through the great banqueting-room, where the wedding feast was prepared, and then took us outside to our carriage, only, previous to saying good-bye, more garlands were thrown over me, so that on reaching the hotel I could truly scarcely walk up the steps from the fearful weight of them, for I certainly had on me by that time quite six or seven, and all thick, large and long.

One interesting expedition we made to the celebrated Caves of Elephanta ; they are on some prettily-shaped islands a little way out of the harbour. Starting in the cool of the evening in a small steam pinnacle, we took our tea with us and had it on the way. By the time we reached the caves the air was sufficiently freshened to enable us to climb and explore with ease the very curious rocks and formations. The caves are formed into a subterranean temple, many of the stones being carved into huge grotesque gods, all portraying great antiquity ; they are now carefully preserved by the Government. On our return we had a glorious view of the vast and beautiful harbour, with its endless shipping and the fine city beyond, the rays of a golden rosy sunset casting their reflections all over the sea, on which not a ripple was to be seen.

On Sunday I attended the cathedral ; it is a really fine and worthy edifice of the Anglican church, and the frequent services are most beautifully rendered with great earnestness and reverence. The Anglo-Indians are very proud of it, and justly so, and the Bishop is much beloved by all, who feel he is the mainspring of the good church work going on there.

The Gymkhana races and sports at Parel, which is one of the governor's residences in the neighbourhood, were among the most amusing of the gatherings that we attended. It is rather a dreary house, but has nice gardens and a sort of park, where the pony races, polo matches and various pastimes came off, the governor, Lord Harris, and all his A.D.C.'s. and his military secretary, Colonel Rhodes, taking part, Lady Harris giving away the prizes at the end, most of the officers quartered near and some from far off having come to join in the different races and sports. All the principal people of the neighbourhood were

present, besides a good many Parsees and natives of importance.

Prior to leaving Bombay, we stayed for a few days with the governor at Malabar Point, another of his places in the vicinity, with which I was quite enchanted. It consists of a number of bungalows standing on the edge of a sloping cliff just above the sea. The drive out there all along the sea-shore was quite charming, being laid out in gardens, planted with the richest tropical plants, varied here and there by groves of palm-trees, and many of the graceful Parsee women in their pretty draperies were walking or standing in groups on the sands. My bungalow was most luxurious, for I had a suite of very comfortable rooms, my sitting-room being quite in the open-air and formed by a canopy overhead, carpets and rugs on the ground and endless easy chairs of all kinds. The view from it was quite exquisite, and I much enjoyed watching the ships sailing about, and could easily have thrown a stone into the water. We had a pleasant party staying in the house, among them Sir Frederick Roberts, now Lord Roberts, who was then commander-in-chief of the forces ; he was on a tour of inspection. A good number of our party attended a great review he made of the troops in those parts, but, though somewhat reluctantly, I refrained from accompanying, for the heat had been so terrific I hardly felt equal to it.

I had some interesting conversation with this distinguished general, who I heard had almost to live in the train to overtake his military duties of inspecting the forces throughout that vast Indian Empire. He had in consequence a large railway carriage well fitted up like a miniature house, in which he always travelled on every line in the country. We also met at Malabar Point the late Mr. W. H. Smith's eldest son on his way home from a tour round the world, who gave us much useful information regarding Japan, and recommended to us the guide he had there, whom we did employ, and who curiously enough had also acted as guide to Lord and Lady Harris when they were in Japan.

One day their Excellencies took us to the Bombay races, which were most entertaining. Many Arabs had horses running, for they are the principal dealers there, and are continually bringing them over from Arabia. They get tremendously excited backing their horses, and lead them out of the paddocks in their

national dress, a sort of brown flowing dressing-gown and peculiar-shaped turban. They made these races much more effective as a sight than those we had seen at Calcutta, but at both the jockeys were mixed, some being English while others were natives. There is a regular quarter in the town where the Arab dealers live, and as you drive through the native district you pass these streets, and see numbers and numbers of them in their singular costumes, and hardly any other people in that particular part of the city. Lady Harris very kindly proposed I should accompany her on a visit to a Maharanee. Naturally I was most eager to avail myself of this opportunity of seeing something further of the people and habits of the country; but to my great regret having taken our passages on a steamship for a certain date, I was obliged to forego this interesting visit, which was not to be made, unfortunately, till after the day that we had arranged to sail.

We had much wished to visit Mysore and Hyderabad, especially the latter, as it is entirely a native state, but the season by now was so advanced we found the heat would have been unbearable; therefore we resolved instead to go to the Nilgherry Hills, in the Madras Presidency, and as far as possible by sea. In consequence we arranged to go by a coasting ship to Calicut, and from there by train and carriage to the hills. Our Parsee friends and several others came to see us off, and among them my bearer Shereef, mentioned already in the first part of these travels. He assured me his caste would not allow of his going into the Madras Presidency; this may have been true, as with some of the natives it is the case, also their castes sometimes prevent them going by sea; but I had a shrewd suspicion in Shereef's case it was that he was in a great fright of the ocean, for when with us on the way to the Caves of Elephanta he was terrified. Rogue though he was I was very sorry to part with him, he was such a character; he caused me endless amusement and had accompanied me everywhere, proving a capital guide. However, "Yellapea," our other bearer, remained with us throughout till we went to China. He was what they termed in India a "Madrasee Boy;" the said "boy" being an elderly man and a grandfather. Though not such a rogue and more honest than Sheeref, he was most fearfully grasping, quite a beggar in extracting money.

It took us five days to reach Calicut, for our vessel being partly a trading ship touched at each port all along the coast, putting off and taking on cargo, a very disagreeable performance for passengers on board of her, the noise of the coolies at work being quite distracting, and some of the freight having a most objectionable smell ; also the instant we were at anchor, so making no breeze, the heat was stifling. She was a comfortable ship ; my cabin was roomy, with four large windows instead of small port-holes ; she had, though, one terrible drawback, which was that she was over-run with cockroaches ; they literally swarmed at night, you trod on them at each step. Selecting the top berth to sleep in I hoped thus to escape them in bed ; not a bit of it, very soon my large brown friends were creeping on the wall all round me. Never shall I forget hearing shrieks from a fellow-passenger with whom I had made friends, to come to her assistance, finding her dancing with terror on her cabin-box, because the floor was one mass of cockroaches. I told "Yellapea" to come and kill them ; he replied, "No good lady ; kill one, more come." He was right, for on slaying one, instantly dozens seemed to appear in its place. I was indeed thankful after five nights with these torments to find we were at our destination, and at seven o'clock in the morning we left our ship and went on shore in a canoe ; the natives who were paddling, shrieking rather like a lot of infants on coming out from school to play, in order to keep time together. They had rigged up an awning to protect us from the sun, for even at that early hour it was most powerful, and I was glad to have on my large sun-hat, especially as this awning had been put too low to allow of a parasol, besides which, the least movement would have overturned the canoe, so that it would have been difficult to hold one up, for we had to sit straight and perfectly still. Our boat was lifted on shore by the surf ; but as this did not take us high enough to escape wetting our feet on getting out, before I knew where I was two stalwart natives had seized me and placed me on their shoulders, carrying me off at full speed to the gharry (a close fly) which was waiting to convey us to the train.

Calicut is prettily situated in the midst of a forest of palms, and somewhat recalled to me the Island of Mauritius, but is not nearly so beautiful. At each station fruits of all kinds were brought by the natives for us to buy, mangoes, mangoustines, melons, bananas,

pineapples, &c. ; and at one we found an excellent "tiffin" prepared, as luncheon is called in India, but one had not much appetite, for the heat was terrific ; actually, going along at full speed in a large sort of saloon carriage built expressly to be cool, placing a thermometer in a thorough draught with windows open all round, it registered over 100 degrees. We stayed one night at Podanur, finding fairly good accommodation in the railway rooms over the station, and proceeded early the next morning to Metapollium, where we had ordered tongas, little two-horse curricles, to be in readiness to take us up to the Nilgherries. Imagine our dismay on discovering that suddenly Lady Wenlock, the governor's wife, had arrived from Madras that day, and required all the ponies that could be had to convey herself and her suite to the Government house in the hills of the Madras Presidency, so there was nothing for it but to wait many hours until some of the ponies had returned and rested before we could start. Eventually we benefited by this, as thus we remained in shelter from the sun when it was at its fiercest under punkas, which for a small gratuity a woman and her little girl in turns pulled the whole time, apparently without feeling the least fatigue or heat. At last we got off as the afternoon was cooling ; we changed ponies six times during the ascent, the way becoming more and more beautiful as we advanced, passing partly through woods, where the loveliest tropical creepers were hanging from the trees, such as alamandars, taxonias and quantities of wild heliotrope, till the air was filled with sweet scents, then coming to tea plantations, the whole road winding up and up, so that at each turn you could look back on to the plains below, making altogether a most exquisite scene. It took us four hours to reach Coonoor, where we had settled to stay in preference to going higher to Ootacamund, fearing we might feel at the latter place, particularly at night, the sudden change of its colder climate after the great heats we had lately experienced. In the native village as we neared Coonoor, we were much amused to see the coloured population all playing cricket together, and thoroughly enjoying it too.

Our hotel was by far the nicest I have ever been in. It stood in a grove of orange trees, which were in full bloom at the time, and was surrounded by a fine hedge of heliotrope and roses, and it consisted of a group of well-furnished bungalows, with verandahs outside them full of the choicest flowers. We found

in the moderate climate here many English vegetables, which will not generally grow in hot countries, such as green peas, asparagus and French beans. We made an excursion one day to Ootacamund, for by going in the middle of the day and returning before sunset one did not feel it cold ; we were charmed with the way it was laid out and with the landscape generally. After a very pleasant week of perfect repose in a delightfully cool atmosphere, we left Coonoor to return again to Calicut, taking passages in another ship for Ceylon. If possible, the scenery in the descent of the Nilgherries was even more beautiful than the ascent ; becoming dark before the end of our drive, we were lighted by the rays of a brilliant moon, while the whole of the air was alive with fire-flies dancing everywhere. Sleeping again at Podanur and at Calicut, where the heat was so intense I was obliged to have a punka going all night, we embarked at cock-crow the following day, joining our steamer in the same sort of canoe as on our arrival.

This ship was a great improvement on the previous one, being altogether cleaner ; the stewards on both were Portuguese from Goa, while the crews were Lascars ; never did I see small boats so quickly and so easily lowered as on this vessel. Remarking on it to the captain, he told me he prided himself on this, because, both carrying and being manned by such numbers of natives, "man overboard" was such a common occurrence. I further alluded to the comfort of finding no cockroaches ! He burst out laughing, exclaiming, "Oh ! then you have been on the 'Mecca.' " He then told me she had a renown for her cockroaches among all the sailors employed by the company she belonged to. We had a much mixed set of passengers in the steerage, Chinese, Malays and Arabs, besides natives of India, the Mohammedans among them as usual prostrating themselves at sunset, without any fear or shame at showing their faith, in which they put Christians so much to shame, who are always half afraid of showing their creed and never like to be seen worshipping thus openly except in church. We hardly ever lost sight of land, so had a good opportunity of viewing the coast of Southern India, which seemed very pretty. When touching at Tuticorin, I much regretted there was not time for me to go on shore and visit the famous Temples of Madura. Five days and five nights brought us to Colombo, which has a fine harbour, but otherwise does not

strike one on arrival, though the varied shipping and native craft, including catamarans laden with fruit for sale, form an interesting sight.

It so happened that we reached Colombo on Sunday, so finding in the evening there was a service at the cathedral, I took a "jinrickshaw," or "rickshaw," as they are generally called, being a little two-wheeled carriage drawn by a man, and went there, past some native kraals and through numbers of palm groves along the sea-shore, with here and there a beautiful scarlet mimosa in full bloom, and in about twenty minutes I arrived. It is a fine building, and the music was very good. On the way I had my first opportunity of seeing some of the inhabitants, the men surprising me much, as they look more like women, especially the young men, for they all wear a petticoat instead of trousers, and their hair long and twisted into a roll at the back and no hair on their faces, giving them a most effeminate appearance; but the old men do wear moustaches and whiskers. The Cingalese of both sexes are a very good-looking race, so are their children, who when small were usually running about without clothes, but with a silver bangle round the waist. The women frequently wear English cottons, but of the brightest colours, mostly pinks, draped around them in native fashion.

The cinnamon gardens outside the town are very pretty and well laid out. We experienced a great many most awful thunderstorms during the three weeks of our stay on the island, in fact hardly an evening passed without one. The lightning was magnificent, lighting up the country and sea for miles and miles round, while the clapping of the thunder was terrible, and the torrents of rain such as I have never seen elsewhere; in one minute the whole road was a sheet of water, and the tremendous steam rising from it after was most disagreeable, causing the sort of heated damp feeling of a hot-house. We had had a good many of such storms at sea, between the Cape and India, when crossing the Equator, till everything both above and below felt wet and clammy; but they were nothing to those in Ceylon. The mosquitoes were a fearful trouble to me everywhere, but the Colombo mosquitoes beat all others, and they were so dreadfully poisonous, causing my feet, which they attacked the most, not only to swell but to turn black and blue, making me quite feverish and obliging me to bathe the poisoned part

with the coldest water I could procure every hour to keep down the inflammation.

In the course of a few days we moved to Kandy, the railway passing by the most glorious scenery from sea-level to 2,000 feet above, through great steep cuttings of rock, with distant views of fine mountains and valleys and surrounded by the richest tropical vegetation: in fact we seemed to travel through one large never-ending garden of the finest trees, shrubs and flowers. We found the nights there much cooler, for a pleasant breeze often got up at sunset, although at times during the day the heat was very trying.

We went for one night to Newra Ellijah, which seemed almost cold in comparison. I was much disappointed in this hill station; therefore I was rather glad, as we failed to find proper accommodation, to return to Kandy. Close to our hotel there was a celebrated Buddhist temple. Every evening at 6 p.m. a service took place, so we attended it one night. It began with the curious tum-tum native music outside the inner temple, afterwards a priest, in a white and scarlet vestment, entered the sanctuary, in the centre of which was the high altar, brilliantly lighted with candles, before which he prostrated himself and knelt in prayer for a few minutes, and then all was over, the people coming in and out all the time scattering flowers. A crystal and gold casket, which contains a tooth, supposed to be one of the Prophet Buddha's own, therefore most precious to all Buddhists, lay on the altar. It was said that it had only once been opened, on the occasion of the Prince of Wales' visit to this temple. In the outer court a large elephant's tusk was lying; for fun I touched it and asked an old priest who was standing near whether this was not Buddha's tooth. His face of horror and indignation can hardly be pictured; he thought I really believed it was. A great festival of this religion occurred during our stay in the neighbourhood; endless processions appeared in connection with it, always accompanied by the band and its big drum, making real ding-dong music. At the time a large number of the Salvation Army were stationed near, and they too went about in procession with a band of the same kind, so that it was impossible to distinguish whether they were Buddhists or Salvationists, for the latter had also adopted a native dress of red and yellow drapery. We had encountered them in all parts of India, where they also wore these costumes.

Hearing a Buddhist priest's funeral was to take place a little way off we got a carriage, and, after driving through the loveliest landscape of gardens, river and lake, we were set down in a thick wood, where, after walking some distance, we came to the part railed off for the cremation. The jungle had been cleared away, a huge erection of logs made, with a high palisade of the stems of palms placed round them, and fresh long threads of grass hanging between each stem. A good number of Cingalese had assembled to attend the ceremony. While waiting we cut ourselves some fresh cocoa-nuts and enjoyed drinking the milk, for it was very sultry. I also gathered a nice bunch of wild jessamine, lilies and a sort of white crocus, with a perfume rather like stephanotis, besides several other sweet flowers. Suddenly one of our party holloed out, "Something is at my leg." Pulling up his trousers to his ankle we discovered a leech sucking hard. We had scarcely removed the objectionable little creature when we heard the usual music in the distance, and presently the band appeared preceding the funeral procession. First came a large number of priests with shaven heads and faces, wearing sandals on their feet and dressed in yellow flowing robes; next came a few nuns in white, followed by the coffin borne by six men. It was painted yellow and was covered with silver and gold paper flowers, and was at once deposited on the pile prepared, the priests praying audibly for some time, after which large quantities of water were poured on the pile, then oil, and finally the whole was set in flames. Undoubtedly it was a much less painful sight than the burning of the Hindoos at the ghats on the banks of the Ganges, especially as the Buddhists, unlike the Hindoos, reduce their remains to ashes.

The Paradinyah Gardens, which were not far off, are very beautiful. They contain the most exquisite plants and trees of the rarest sorts. The bread-tree was in flower; it has a lovely pink blossom, and the bamboos and bananas were simply magnificent. The upas tree was pointed out to us as the most poisonous of all plants. We were also shown several very fine orchid houses, but on the whole I admire the Pampelmous Gardens in the Mauritius the most. On leaving we visited a tea factory close by, which was rather interesting; it was chiefly worked by machinery, and not as it is in China, all done by hand. The Cingalese are so lazy and work so badly, they are not

employed, but native hands are sent for from Madras and Southern India.

While waiting for our ship to proceed on our further travels we decided to stay at Mount Lavinia, in preference to Colombo, being a health resort about half-an-hour's drive from the city. We found there a splendid hotel built on a rock, standing out from the shore facing the open sea. As this spot was always favoured with a good breeze, for once we were not tormented by mosquitoes, for the wind was too strong for them to live there; the beds actually had no mosquito curtains, they were not needed. Here we met with the best of all the curries we had eaten in the East, particularly those made with fish newly caught; the freshly-grated cocoa-nut and many other dainties which are served with it, especially a certain sort of biscuit, all adding to the excellency of this Oriental dish. One of my amusements was watching from my window the natives fishing off the rocks with a long line, or from canoes. We also met here with the best mangoes I had tasted anywhere, and no natives knew so well as the Cingalese how to prepare them, so as to eat them easily without losing any of the juice, and in that great heat one found it a comfort to have no exertion even in eating fruit! It seemed strange thus in February and March to be experiencing such heat, when letters from home told of a terrible snow-storm and blizzard in the latter month all along the southern and south-western coast of England.

Just as we were leaving Ceylon, we heard of a most ghastly murder by a Cingalese of his master. I had been told they were rather a treacherous race, but in this case the murdered man was known to be very kind to his servants and liked by them, therefore his death was the more surprising. He was a tea-planter, and unmarried, and lived alone at some distance from any of the white population. He had dismissed his butler for some reason; the latter took this quietly and seemed not to mind, from what his fellow-servants said, but suddenly in the middle of dinner he stabbed his master from behind while waiting on him.

To set against this, an old Scotchman I met, who had spent all his life in Ceylon, related to me that on one occasion he had been very ill indeed, quite at death's door, at the time he was living alone with native servants, far away from all others, but his bearer nursed and doctored him with such care and skill, procuring

herbs in the woods near, which he prepared and then gave him, that eventually he cured him.

There are a few Malays among the servants in the island. It is so curious in their faces to see the beginning of the approach to the Chinese or Mongolian type of countenance; of the refined kind, mixed with the Indian native look, but not the coarse kind of Chinese face like the Bhooties at Darjeeling. I heard that in some of the most unfrequented forests in Ceylon there was a dwarf tribe, who from never holding intercourse with any one are nearly dumb, because their king alone is allowed to speak to others than his own race. But I believe they are fast dying out, as these kind of people generally do when civilization approaches them.

We embarked for Hong Kong on board of a very fine steamer of 6,000 tons, belonging to the North German Lloyd Co.; she was quite the most luxurious ship I have ever been in. My cabin had two port-holes, a wardrobe and a spring mattress on the fixed iron bedstead. The saloon was painted white and gold, even to the pianoforte case and the rod of the punka, which was hung with olive-green damask, the sofas and chairs being covered with the same, while the walls and ceilings were painted in fresco. During dinner a beautiful string band played charming music and a brass band played on deck every morning. There was a hair-dresser's shop on the ship, which was thoroughly well fitted up, and a skilful hair-dresser ready to attend on any who needed him.

We touched at Singapore and spent some hours on shore, driving about the beautiful island, but after the wonderful countries we had been in it disappointed me; besides, the Chinese population were so unattractive in comparison to the picturesque people of India. The day after we had been there, I had got up from my chair to fetch a book; on the way I leaned over the ship's side for a little while, when suddenly like a flash I saw something fly into the sea from the fore-castle; at the same time a shrill whistle came from the bridge and the cry, "Man over-board." The captain, who was standing near, rushed past me and gave orders to stop. We lowered a boat, threw out life-buoys, but all in vain; the figure was never seen again. At first it was thought to be one of the Chinese passengers from the steerage, who will often commit suicide if they have lost money

gambling ; it turned out, though, to be a German, who was destitute and had been taken on in compassion by the captain at Singapore, at the request of the German Consul, in order that he should thus get a free passage home. He had agreed to work as a stoker and had professed to be pleased to be among his own countrymen again, but it was thought possibly the great heat of the furnaces had suddenly affected his brain, consequently his committing suicide by throwing himself into the ocean. It was a painful occurrence and for a short time caused rather a gloom.

On this voyage I saw one night the Southern Cross to better advantage in the sky than I had ever done before. Standing out astern of our steamer it enabled me to understand how Spanish sailors, living in the superstitious ages, with all the excitable feelings and vivid imaginations of a southern race, had hailed it as a beacon light when out of their course at sea.

We now fully realized that we were approaching China, on passing some junks of the Celestial Empire, each with a large eye painted on the fore part of the boat, for every ship and boat, no matter what its size is, has an eye painted on her bows, even to the men-of-war, for the Chinaman says otherwise they could not see. I shall, though, reserve for my next narrative our proceedings in Hong Kong and China.

L. A. L.

Mademoiselle Margallo.

By HASTINGS BERKELEY.

CHAPTER I.

MADemoiselle OLYMPE MARGALLO was leaning out of her studio window. The evening sun, which is good to those who live on top floors, glinted upon her dark locks, which she wore short and curled; and the evening breeze, which played with them, helped the evening sun to render them beautiful. Sixty feet below her was the busy and cheerful life of the streets of Paris.

But it was not with the sun, nor with the breeze, nor with the life of the streets below that Mademoiselle Margallo's attention was engaged. Her thoughts had wandered away to the writer of the letter which she held, open and half-read, in her hand. The *bonne* had but a moment ago brought it into the room, and her young mistress, tired with the long day's work, had just laid down the mallet and chisel with which she had been busy upon a statue of the young Sophocles hymning the victory of Salamis.

Mademoiselle Margallo had had a Spanish-American for a father and an Englishwoman for a mother. Both had died when she was still a child. Certain friends of the father, in an informal sense guardians of the little girl, had placed her in an Ursuline convent school. All things considered, it would have seemed natural enough that as the girl grew into womanhood she should have preferred the safety and sanctity of the convent to the snares and dangers of a world in which she had no natural protectors. So, at least, had the matter presented itself to the *révérende mère* at the head of the establishment—an excellent and pious person, but always in want of money for her multifarious charities and for the forwarding of the general work of the convent, to the foundation of which she had herself devoted the whole of her fortune. Possibly the wish for the money was father to the thought for the girl, for Mademoiselle Margallo had not been left a penniless orphan. But the young girl was by no means of the stuff of which nuns are made. From her earliest youth she had been haunted by dreams of beauty, to which the pencil in her infant fingers had sought to give form. She had

scarcely come to learn that there were in the world such persons as artists than the wish to become one took firm root in her, and she secretly determined that an artist she would be. Her father's friends, after a stubborn but fruitless opposition, had given way, and, as soon as her school-time had come to an end, had let her set to work under a master. And now, at three-and-twenty, she had elected to live her life unfettered, and was about as careless of the *qu'en dira-t-on* as any respectable young person brought up in a convent could well be.

She was not exactly a pretty woman, Nature having denied her the roundness and suavity of line essential to feminine beauty, but she was graceful in motion, tall and slender, and the pale oval face, set in its dark frame of short curling locks, was made almost beautiful by a pair of eyes full of life and animation. The letter was held in a hand which had in it something masculine, yet which was white and shapely ; a hand, you would say, made for work which required at once strength and delicacy of touch, and, moreover, a hand which seemed to correspond to what was, as a matter of fact, the ideal to which the artist strove to give expression, the beauty of the "human form divine"—especially of the male human form—of which Mademoiselle Margallo was enamoured ; artistically, platonically, in the abstract, be it well understood. There, a mute witness of her artistic tendencies, stood the almost finished young Sophocles, half-virile, the hesitancy of adolescence well marked in the lines of the scarcely-matured form of manhood.

Mademoiselle Margallo recalled her thoughts. They had wandered into the past ; back to that convent life which she had shared with the other *pensionnaires* in general, and in particular with the young English girl whose letter she now went on to read. The young English girl and she had been abiding friends ; they had corresponded regularly since the parting of their ways, and this was the first letter which the artist had received since her friend had been taken to wife by an English third secretary of legation, now attached to the British Embassy at Constantinople.

This was the letter :

"Therapia, May 15th.

"DEAREST OLYMPE,

"If you still love me you will have thought it a very long time since my last letter, and so indeed it is ; but you can have no

idea of what a very long and busy thing it is to get married—of all that comes before and all that follows after, how it takes up every scrap of your time and leaves you not a moment of leisure to put pen to paper for the love of your friends—so, dear, you must forgive me if I have seemed neglectful; and at any rate I promise to make amends in the future. But of that other promise, which I have not forgotten, and of which you reminded me in your last letter? The old, old convention, which I suspect so many a pair of girl friends have made and will make: that the first married shall tell the other all about it. Well, dear, it is a most unsatisfactory thing. I don't mean the marriage, but the convention; for there is nothing worth the telling, unless it be that a man is a much less strange monster than his hirsute appendage first paints him in an innocent young girl's fancy. I daresay some men *are* monsters; but oh! Olympe, some indeed are not, and my heart overflows with the desire to tell of its happiness. And after a way, too, which I would not dare take with any soul but yours, *ma chérie*. All this is but a mere preamble to say that Hugo is adorable, and has but one fault, to which I will come back by-and-by. He is clever, he is good, tender, loving, thoughtful. I could string together for another half-page all the delightful adjectives, but that I long to get to the last and perhaps the best: Olympe, he is beautiful!

"Yes, he is beautiful. What an immensity of meaning in the word! First, for the woman who loves, and next, Olympe, for the artist who admires. His best man told me that he, Hugo, when he was a midshipman (he was in the navy for some time as a lad) used to be known in the fleet as 'the Greek dream of beauty'—I had no idea naval officers had in them so poetical a turn; certainly my brother Jim has not. But to come back. Yes: a Greek dream of beauty; one could not find an expression, vague though it be, more adequate to the subject. You must, you *shall* do a bust of him, Olympe. How delightful it would be—and such a model! One worthy of your chisel. By the way, that reminds me to ask about the young Sophocles. How are you getting on with him? Are you satisfied with your work? If so, I shall know it could not be better. But, dear, you must have been very hard at work these months past. I imagine you pale and peaky, in need of rest. Why not give yourself a holiday? Why not come out to us here? It is *such* a pretty

place—one of the suburbs of Constantinople, on the banks of the Bosphorus, and the summer quarters of the Embassy. We have a much larger house than we need for ourselves and we could turn one of the spare rooms with a northern light into a studio for you, if, after a delightful little spell of idling, the fancy took you to do some work again. I need not say that Hugo enthusiastically seconds my invitation; he is almost, but not *quite*, looking over my shoulder as I write. Perhaps he has seen the terms in which I have described him to you, but he is so deliciously free from vanity that I don't mind if he has

"Now I have sent him out about his business at the Embassy, and I can muster up courage at last to tell you of his only fault. I hate to say it, but you shall have a true picture, the deep shadows as well as the high lights. Well, his great and only fault is that he is jealous—but, my dear, *frantically* jealous. You will see that I am not making a mountain out of a mole-hill when I tell you that if a man under seventy looks at me admiringly, he (Hugo) positively turns pale with annoyance—(green, I believe, is the proper colour, but he is too beautiful to do that)—and often he will barely speak to me for the rest of the day. Of course, in a way, this very fault, this jealousy, endears him yet more to me; but I am too practical a little person not to see that it may become a source of misunderstandings and of the gravest annoyance and pain to both of us. And what is to be done? What medicine is there for this malady? How does one combat such a mania? By humouring it or by opposing it? That is the question I have continually before me; and it is beginning already, though as yet ever so slightly, to flavour my happiness with a bitter tinge. You who are so quick and clever, Olympe, can you solve me that riddle? I crouch before it as if it were that propounded by the Sphinx, feeling that I am like indeed to be devoured if I fail to answer it correctly. I want your advice, dear Olympe, dear and quick-witted girl. Come and be the physician to this grief. It will be so delightful to have you with me again. Come quickly.

"Ever your loving

"MADGE."

Mademoiselle Margallo fell into a profound reverie. The prospect of visiting Constantinople was not unattractive to her. She was very fond of her friend Madge Wilford. It might even

be worth while, for an artist, to travel a thousand miles to behold the impersonation of a Greek dream of beauty. Possibly, too, some pretty scheme might be devised, some happy experiment tried, in the direction of solving that riddle put to her by her friend. Jealousy, thought Mademoiselle Margallo, is at all times a feeling which belittles whom it seizes ; in this case it appeared as a positive degradation. Such a man, if he were rightly depicted, should be as a god, calm, self-centred, in the Olympian sense self-satisfied, as possessing the supreme gift: Beauty, the compeller of homage.

Mademoiselle Margallo was not, as her friend supposed, pale and peaky. It was true that she had been continuously at work, all day and every day, or nearly so, these months past. But she made shift to get a ride in the *Bois*, alone, three days a week, and on the other mornings to play a good bout with the foils. Her first fencing-master had tried fencing of a kind which she could not tolerate ; she had sent him away with a pink which, likely enough, was more painful than if it had been delivered with a veritable and unbuttoned foil, and had called in an older and more sedate hand. These doings of hers had been and were yet not unnaturally looked upon with disfavour by the friends of her childhood, but she had been quick to see that by no possible means could her elected way and that of orthodox respectability be made to run upon all-fours, and she had submitted to the necessity of quarrelling with her old friends. She had made no new ones, unless her old and faithful *bonne* and the aforesaid sedate fencing-master could be accounted such. Thus, living to all intents and purposes alone, and entirely taken up with her art, she had grown to look upon all other matters as of secondary importance, and upon what other people thought of her and her doings as of no importance at all.

The outcome of Mademoiselle Margallo's meditation was that she determined to accept her friend's invitation. Accordingly, on the following morning she wrote to her to say that she would arrive in Constantinople towards the end of June, about a month hence, and then she set to work again on the young Sophocles. But the work would not go properly ; for some reason or other Mademoiselle Margallo could not concentrate her attention on it ; a strange freak of fancy had taken possession of her ; she could not drive it away ; it was a veritable obsession.

At last she yielded to it. Forty-eight hours later she was steaming out of Marseilles in one of the *Messageries Maritimes*.

CHAPTER II.

THE ambassador's yacht was lying at her moorings in Therapia Creek, white wisps of vapour flying from her funnels : two or three men were bringing up chairs from below and setting them about on deck. The ambassador had issued invitations to a water picnic—a short excursion to the islands which lie away to the south-east of the Golden Horn. A little farther out were three or four caïques gliding swiftly and noiselessly upon the somnolent flood, and a little farther out yet an ugly and dirty-looking Turkish war-vessel was dropping slowly down mid-stream, which the morning sun had for the moment turned into a river of gold. All this and a good deal more, which it would be tedious to particularize, might have been seen to advantage from the morning-room window of a pleasant-looking house standing some hundred and fifty yards away from the head of the creek, had any one been there desirous to look out of it. But Mr. Hugo Wilford, just in from his morning ride, was more occupied with his breakfast than with the scenery.

"How lovely it is!" exclaimed Mrs. Wilford, as she came into the room and sat down by the window, unmindful of the more material comfort which awaited her. Then, with a slightly malicious glance at her husband, she added, "They say the old pagan Greeks cared very little for what we call scenery. You ought to have been born three thousand years ago, Hugo; you were made for a pagan Greek."

"Thanks, my dear; I find I do tolerably well as an Englishman, and as for the scenery, why, I have seen this pretty picture a great many more times than you have; the freshness of it has worn off. I own that just now I find the coffee and poached eggs more interesting."

Mrs. Wilford glanced at the letters lying on the breakfast-table. "By-the-way," she said, "that reminds me I had a letter from Olympe Margallo last night; she says she is coming at the end of the month. I am sure you will like her, Hugo." There was a faintly apologetic tone in the last words. Mr. Wilford remarked it.

"But of course, my darling Madge, why should I not?"

Nevertheless, Mr. Wilford seemed to take but moderate interest in the subject of his wife's communication, for he dropped into another matter with the question: "Who is this Mr. Francillon who called on us yesterday?"

"I haven't a notion. It appears it was that mad Lady Wynford who told him to call. She spoke to me about him last time I saw her, in her usual flighty way, but what she did say about him I don't in the least remember."

"I believe I've seen him," remarked Mr. Wilford, looking rather cross; "a slight, foreign-looking young fellow, rather outlandish; wears a grey frock coat and a soft felt hat; feet that look as if they were not meant to walk upon; sort of man you might expect to meet out shooting in a pair of varnished shoes and clocked socks."

Madge Wilford sighed. "I daresay he will be very uninteresting; still I am afraid you are bound to return his call."

"I suppose so," replied her husband, with a grunt of disapproval.

The yacht was to start at eleven. Many people came from Pera, some from Galata, others from Buyukdere and Kadikeui; by land and by water they trooped on board. The Wilfords were about the last to walk up the accommodation ladder. As they stepped on deck, a slender, dark young man in a grey frock coat and soft felt hat came forward and saluted Mrs. Wilford, standing heel to heel and bareheaded in the foreign not ungracefully formal manner. "I was unfortunate enough to find you not at home when I called yesterday, Mrs. Wilford. Permit me to introduce myself—Mr. Francillon. Lady Wynford doubtless will have mentioned my name to you."

Mrs. Wilford gaped, blushed, let fall a book which she was holding in her hand, and answered with absolute incoherence. Mr. Wilford looked as black as thunder. Mr. Francillon, in no way disconcerted, stooped down quickly to pick up the book, but, as it happened that Mr. Wilford stooped at the same moment, the two men knocked their heads together.

Oddly enough, while striving to apologize for his share of awkwardness, this little accident appeared to amuse Mr. Francillon, for he laughed with real laughter; so merry was the silver sound of it and so evident its innocent intention that Mrs. Wilford found it contagious, and Mr. Wilford, whose handsome features had begun to harden into anger, relaxed into a smile.

"Hugo," said Mrs. Wilford, addressing her husband, who did not appear to have heard what the young man had said, "this is Mr. Francillon, who called yesterday when we were out."

Whether Mr. Wilford was glad or sorry to make this singular young man's acquaintance he himself scarcely knew, but he certainly expressed himself as more delighted than he looked.

The yacht, by this time out of the creek, was steaming down the Bosphorus, the visitors were broken up into groups admiring the scenery or discussing last night's fancy dress ball at Hobart Pasha's, which had been a great success. Some one came up and took Wilford by the arm, leading him away towards the yacht's stern. Mrs. Wilford and Mr. Francillon were left together alone.

"It is nearly two years since we last saw each other, Madge. Do you find me much changed?"

"Apparently, my dear, into a dangerous madcap—that is, if a madcap *can* be dangerous to any but himself or herself."

"Provided the danger be for Mr. Francillon, Olympe Margallo will have nothing to complain of."

"Don't talk so loud, and keep at a more respectful distance, please. I don't understand about Lady Wynford."

"That is very simple. Lady Wynford was last year one of the very rare visitors at Olympe Margallo's studio in Paris, and she took a great fancy to that young lady. Olympe gave her twin-brother, Mr. Francillon, a letter of introduction to Lady Wynford, who, as you know, likes interesting young people."

"She does. Still, flighty as she is, she might be expected to remember that an unmarried woman's brother has the same surname as his sister."

"Not always. Not, as in this case, when the brother has been naturalized an Englishman under his English mother's name."

"And what does Mr. Francillon propose to do in Constantinople?"

"I propose to undertake a cure."

"A cure—of what? A cure of souls?"

"Of one soul, at all events."

At this moment Mr. Wilford came up to them again.

"Oh, Hugo!" exclaimed his wife, "here is a curious surprise: Mr. Francillon turns out to be Olympe Margallo's twin-brother. I never met Mr. Francillon before, but I was struck by the extraordinary likeness when we came on board."

"I have not had the pleasure of seeing Miss Margallo, my dear, so the surprise comes upon me less curiously—though none the less agreeably," he added, with an afterthought of politeness. Then, glancing at his wife, "Certainly the resemblance must have been very striking to have affected you so visibly."

"We are extraordinarily like one another," observed the young man.

Mr. Wilford had a rather mocking smile. "I cannot help thinking, Mr. Francillon, that you must be more like your sister than you are like yourself."

Mr. Francillon's merry argentine laugh broke out again. "A clear paradox, Mr. Wilford, but certainly a neat way of suggesting that I am rather effeminate in looks. Well, you see, my sister and I are twins, and I suppose Nature hesitated till the last moment which she would make which."

So friendly and charming was Mr. Francillon's manner that the other man was disarmed. "No one will presume to find fault with Nature for having hesitated," he replied.

"Least of all the ladies, since imitation is the sincerest, and therefore the most telling, form of flattery," and Mr. Francillon glanced at Mrs. Wilford with something marvellously like a simper on his face.

Mr. Wilford affected to smile—*le rire jaune*, as our neighbours have it. He did not give utterance to his thought, which was that Mr. Francillon was a curious mixture of a good fellow and a conceited puppy.

"It is an extraordinary thing that that cook *will* always overdo the joints!" angrily exclaimed Mr. Wilford at dinner that evening.

Madge Wilford looked at the round of beef, which was of a delicate rose pink. "I think it is all right, isn't it, Hugo?—perhaps a trifle underdone if anything."

"It is always one extreme or the other. Here, take it away," replied her husband, addressing the man. "I beg your pardon, my dear; perhaps you would like some."

But Mrs. Wilford let the joint go untasted. As the man disappeared with it, Mr. Wilford went on: "That fellow hasn't more idea of laying the table than the man in the moon. Look at those salt-cellars; right at the very edge of the table—and he

doesn't keep the silver properly clean either. I wish you would give him a talking to. You are much too easy with the servants, Madge ; they take advantage of you."

Mrs. Wilford answered nothing. She knew very well that not the beef, nor the salt-cellars, nor again the inevitable defects of servants had anything to do with her husband's ill-humour, which, in any other person, would have made her smile. But love has no eyes for the humorous—and Mrs. Wilford was pained because she adored. For the remainder of the evening Mr. Wilford maintained an obstinate silence, which looked dignified only because the man was so very handsome.

CHAPTER III.

A FEW days later the officers of the British gun-vessel stationed in the Bosphorus organized a paper chase on horseback. Most of the English young people about the place joined in, the Wilfords among them. The hares started off under the lead of a sergeant-farrier in the Turkish Horse—an Englishman—who knew the country. The hounds met outside the city on the road to the Sweet Waters. As they were about to start, after the ten minutes' law to the hares, Mr. Francillon rode up, mounted upon a street Arab. Let not the Londoner stare in surprise. The Constantinople street Arabs are not as those of London, but equine. You meet them in the streets of Pera ready saddled and bridled for a fare—and the attendant will run behind you, holding on to the animal's tail if you don't object. Some of them are by no means bad horses.

"How do you do, Mrs. Wilford? What a glorious day. I hope we shall have some fun!" and Mr. Francillon at the same time nodded amicably to Mr. Wilford.

"Oh, we are sure to have a good run," replied Madge Wilford ; "but, my dear Mr. Francillon, you don't mean to say you are going across country upon one of those street horses?"

"Why not?—he is a very nice little animal, and I daresay he will jump as well as any of you."

"I think I really would not try. I don't suppose he has ever jumped even over a street gutter. Hugo, do persuade Mr. Francillon not to attempt it."

But Mr. Wilford had not liked the "my dear Mr. Francillon," neither the words nor, for the moment, the man.

"I am afraid there is not time to argue the point," he said, "unless we wish to be left behind."

"Come on!" called out the young man, giving the rein to his horse. "*Qui vivra verra.* I have already tried him over a sweetmeat-seller's bench by the road-side. I don't know which of us three was the most astonished, but he went over beautifully."

The paper-chase was a complete success. One way or another Mr. Francillon and his street Arab managed to get safely over the not very formidable obstacles with which they met, though on one occasion Mr. Francillon was fairly out of the saddle and on his mount's shoulders. The run terminated at a farm-house, whither the organizers had privily dispatched light refreshments, and where every one dismounted.

"What is to be the end of all this?" murmured Mrs. Wilford to Mr. Francillon as the latter handed her a cup of tea.

"The happiness of a pair of lovers," replied he, "and that will also be the end of Mr. Francillon. But, Madge, they say God helps those who help themselves. Do you know that you have never yet once asked me to your house?"

Mrs. Wilford looked round for her husband. "Hugo," she called out, "you are not engaged anywhere to-morrow, are you? I want Mr. Francillon to come and dine with us if he will."

"No, I am not. If Mr. Francillon will come I shall be very glad." The tone of welcome was certainly of the coldest, but Mr. Francillon accepted with alacrity.

The party broke up and the men went in quest of the horses, which had been put up under cover of a shed. Mr. Francillon somewhat officiously insisted on helping Mrs. Wilford up into her saddle—or rather, on trying to do so. But whether it was that Mrs. Wilford sprang at the wrong moment, or that Mr. Francillon lifted at the wrong time, the "one, two, three, up" was productive of quite insufficient results. A second attempt proved equally abortive. And then Mrs. Wilford, moved by something apparently ludicrous in the situation, lent against the flap of the saddle and laughed, while Mr. Francillon, who should by right have been red and annoyed, laughed too. Like a pair of children, who have been set off laughing and cannot stop, these two went on, and so innocent and hearty was their merriment that Mr. Wilford, who was holding the head of his wife's horse, became at once bewildered, impatient, and yet half-inclined to

join in their hilarity. He certainly thought that Mr. Francillon was an extraordinary young man. Finally Mrs. Wilford was hoisted into the saddle, and the three rode home together.

Whether Mr. Francillon was or was not an extraordinary young man, he certainly seemed to produce a singular effect on Mr. Wilford. There were moments when the latter would have been pleased to kick Mr. Francillon, and there were other moments when, on the contrary, he felt strangely attracted towards the young man, whose almost boy-like ways were blended with a charm of manner which had in it something very captivating, something almost endearing. Nevertheless, Mr. Francillon was, to all appearance, a young man who sought to make himself agreeable to Mrs. Wilford, and this was a sin which the husband found it almost impossible to pardon.

At dinner the following day Mr. Francillon came out under a new and, to Mr. Wilford, by no means unwelcome light. He could talk, as he carried himself, with grace, and not without a touch of originality in thought which added charm to the grace of expression. Mr. Wilford, who was himself a clever and well-informed man, thawed somewhat towards his guest, and by the end of dinner, when the hostess left them to their cigarettes, the ice of disapproval had quite melted away. Whether by chance or design the conversation drifted upon the subject of the social relations between the sexes. Mr. Francillon was for more ease, not of manners, but of intellectual intercourse and comradeship between men and women. Gently flourishing his cigarette he remarked :

"The time I always think of as most delightful in that respect was the epoch which preceded the French Revolution. That must have been an ideal decade or two ; when society, as society, was as nearly perfect an organization as possible. And why ? Because men met women as real companions, while now-a-days there is nothing between the sexes outside of formality or flirtation."

"You have been reading Ste. Beuve, and he certainly does paint a rather delightful picture of the social intercourse of those days. At the same time, the morality of society was execrable, and there was no such thing in it as a pleasant *vie d'intérieur*."

"Oh, morality ! That is a matter of time and place. There cannot have been much wrong with it to have made people so

exquisitely amiable, considerate, wise and witty. And as for a pleasant *vie d'intérieur*, it too often means boredom, qualified by occasional fits of jealousy."

"I confess I scarcely see why jealousy is the more likely to come in. On the contrary, home life shuts the door upon it."

"That is scarcely Molière's view, and it must be admitted that he knew something of human nature. A large and free, but entirely respectful and polite comradeship between the sexes shames jealousy out of the field."

"Quite so; and the condition is that men shall like other people's wives better than their own."

"And why not?—'*en tout bien, tout honneur*,' of course. A man may very sincerely love his wife, and yet admire and enjoy in other women qualities which his wife does not possess. English society requires leavening with a touch of communism; there should be a broader exchange and enjoyment in common of all good gifts and qualities. The fault of Englishmen is that very Eastern and unsocial vice—jealousy of their womankind."

"I don't know where you have seen that. I fancy you are theorizing a little. I can't recollect ever having met a really jealous husband. Every one is agreed that such a man is stupid and a bore."

"No, I take English society just as it seems to me—rather stiff, formal, lacking the ease and grace which spring from a more unreserved intercourse. The cause may not be jealousy—perhaps it may lie in the too great pride of exclusive possession of the men in their women. And, really, the business instinct of Englishmen might serve them better; for, after all, you may say without paradox that for society pleasure is a business."

Mr. Wilford smiled, and proposed that they should rejoin his wife in the drawing-room, where Mr. Francillon had an opportunity of putting his theory into practice. Madge Wilford played and sang charmingly—a good quality of accomplishment of which Mr. Francillon took the very fullest advantage, hanging elegantly and adoringly over the instrument and the performer, turning over the leaves of music, warbling passages in unison, and generally conducting himself in a manner so hateful to Mr. Wilford as to re-awaken in the latter an intense desire to kick his visitor out of the room, the more so that Mrs. Wilford appeared to be by no means ill-pleased with Mr. Francillon's compliments and assiduity of attentions.

CHAPTER IV.

THERAPIA is but one among the many villages scattered along both banks of the Bosphorus, in which the upper ten thousand of Constantinople, both Christian and infidel, have their places of summer resort, and in Therapia is one of the smallest of these summer congregations.

The social circle being thus so very small, those who compose it are thrown much together, and so it was with the Wilfords and Mr. Francillon. They rode together, they played tennis together, they went out afloat on the Bosphorus in the gorgeous evenings—all this to the evident enjoyment of Mrs. Wilford and Mr. Francillon, and to the equally evident annoyance and discomfort of Mr. Wilford.

Most unquestionably Mr. Wilford did not like it. Why, then, did Mr. Wilford submit to it? He never even asked himself the question. He knew very well that he was not a jealous husband, and he therefore set down his annoyance to the score of his liver, or his digestion, or the climate, and, indeed, to every one of these in turn. Moreover, Mr. Wilford, having thought the matter over and made out thoroughly to his satisfaction that jealousy was a thing far from him, felt the restraining influence of that conclusion, and showed much more amiability to his wife than had been his wont on certain former occasions. So marked was the change that Mrs. Wilford began to augur well of the course of treatment which her husband was undergoing.

Something there was over and above all this which rendered easier to Mr. Wilford the course of discipline which he was undergoing. His feelings towards Mr. Francillon were confused and hesitant. He perceived by the whole tenor of Mr. Francillon's bearing that the young fellow entertained towards him feelings of friendship and even admiration. Not to be favourably affected towards a person who likes and admires you and shows the liking and admiration is possible only to a brute or to an exceptionally great man. Mr. Wilford was neither the one nor the other. At the same time, and on the other hand, Mr. Francillon's very evident admiration of Mr. Wilford's wife was supremely distasteful to Mr. Wilford himself, and he entirely failed to draw comfort and reassurance from the consideration of those improved social relations which, according to Mr. Francillon, should obtain between the sexes.

On the whole, therefore, it was with a feeling of unfeigned satisfaction and relief that some days later he heard Mr. Francillon declare that the time had come for him to leave the pleasant shores of the Bosphorus. So much relief did Mr. Wilford experience from this declaration that it did not occur to him at the time that there was anything strange in the fact that the young man was to go away just about the time when his twin-sister Mademoiselle Olympe Margallo was to arrive.

"Olympe is to reach Constantinople on Thursday next. Of course I shall go down to meet her and bring her straight back here with me," said Mrs. Wilford.

"But I want to see something of her, too," replied Mr. Francillon. "Friday is the day I leave, so I propose to meet her when she arrives and keep her with me in Constantinople until the next day, when you might come in to fetch her. We will go to the Hôtel . . . d'Europe, isn't it, in the Grande Rue de Pera? and she will wait for you there until you come."

But Mrs. Wilford declared that she would, nevertheless, drive in to Constantinople to welcome her friend on her arrival, so it was arranged that they would meet at the station.

As Mrs. Wilford was to go during that part of the day when her husband was usually busy at the Embassy he did not propose to accompany her, but remained contentedly quiescent in the thought that his perplexities were about to come to an end. It was not till the Thursday itself, in the morning, when Mr. Francillon came to bid him good-bye, that it struck him for the first time as odd that the young man should have selected the time of his sister's arrival for his own departure. A sudden and unreasoning suspicion took hold of him that his wife knew more of Mr. Francillon than she wished to be apparent. After all, who and what was this young man? Whence had he come, and whither was he going? Why had he thus dropped upon them by chance at Therapia? Above all, had there not been all along an unexplained something, as of familiar friendliness, in the relations between his wife and Mr. Francillon; something which had at times seemed to argue long use and wont?

The victoria was at the door. Mrs. Wilford, as she got in, requested her husband to watch the hind wheels of the carriage as it drove off. It had seemed to her that one of them ran unevenly. The carriage started, but Mr. Wilford could notice nothing

wrong with the wheels. What he did notice, however, was that the victoria stopped a hundred yards down the road, opposite the hotel where Mr. Francillon was staying, upon which Mr. Francillon came out and got into the carriage, which at once drove off again towards the city.

Mr. Wilford strolled away towards the Embassy somewhat annoyed with what he had seen. His wife had said not a word to him of her intention to take Mr. Francillon into Constantinople with her. He asked himself whether it were possible that she did not wish him to know it. Scarcely; she would surely not in that case have kept him waiting in the road to look at the retreating vehicle. What was the meaning of it all? There was absolutely nothing the matter with the carriage wheels. He tried to dismiss the matter from his mind and endeavoured to concentrate his attention on the papers before him, but without success.

The picture of his wife driving off with Mr. Francillon persistently interposed itself between him and his work. A sudden and unreasoning wave of anxiety and distrust came over him, and the feeling, perchance as an effect of mental association, vividly recalled to him the undisguised surprise and emotion of his wife on the occasion of her meeting Mr. Francillon on board the ambassador's yacht. He wondered that he should never have thought of asking her whether she had ever met the young man before, forgetful of what his wife had said on the subject on the day of the water picnic.

Finding he could do nothing useful in the way of work, Mr. Wilford put his papers away and returned to the house, where he ordered the groom to saddle his mare. In the saddle, and on the road, he hesitated as to what direction to take. Then yielding to an impulse which he could not master, he turned the mare's head towards Constantinople and trotted slowly down the road leading thither. It was not particularly pleasant riding—the last direction Mr. Wilford would have chosen for pleasure's sake—the road leading through slatternly villages and the offshoots of the capital. He followed it, the yelping curs of the village frequently at the mare's heels, without any very definite purpose in his mind, passed by the Yildiz Kiosque, trotted reluctantly along the embankment, and finally reined up at the foot of one of the steep streets leading into the suburb of Pera. There, while he paused, he recollected that his wife had said something about lunching at the

Hôtel d'Europe ; but, whether before or after fetching Mademoiselle Margallo, he could not recall. Why should he not go up there and meet them all? It would be a pleasant surprise. Having so decided, he cantered up the street with so much precipitation that he nearly knocked down a *hamal* staggering towards the landing-place under an enormous load of luggage.

Arrived at the hotel, Mr. Wilford sent his mare round to the stables and walked into the coffee-room. It was half-past one. Several people were there at luncheon, but among them neither his wife nor Mr. Francillon, nor, to all appearance, Mademoiselle Margallo. The head waiter glided up to him for orders.

"Has Mrs. Wilford been here to luncheon?" he inquired of the man.

"Mrs. Wilford is here now, sir."

Mr. Wilford looked round the room again. "Where?" he asked.

"Madame is taking lunch in one of the private sitting-rooms with a gentleman."

The man's manner was perfectly respectful and decorous, but there had been the shadow of a shade of hesitation in bringing out the last words, and Mr. Wilford felt a stab of shame and annoyance. He showed nothing of it, however, but bade the waiter show him the way to the room, where, on opening the door, he found his wife in the arms of Mademoiselle Olympe Margallo.

Mr. Wilford stopped on the threshold, very much confused.

"Why, Hugo, this *is* nice of you!" exclaimed Mrs. Wilford, in a tone of gentle badinage, at the same time disengaging herself from Mademoiselle Margallo's embrace.

A sharp and sudden prick of suspicion pierced through Mr. Wilford's confusion and dissipated it. He advanced quickly into the room and congratulated Mademoiselle Margallo upon her safe arrival with a warmth and *empressement* of manner which did not altogether hide the trace of irony lurking in his smile and intonation.

"I was rather taken aback on opening the door because I did not expect to find you here," he explained to the young lady. Then, turning to his wife, he added, "I understood from the waiter that Mr. Francillon was here too."

"He was, until a few minutes ago, when Olympe arrived—and he disappeared."

"Oh! . . . Shall we not see him again, then?"

"Only this unworthy imitation of him in petticoats," replied Mademoiselle Olympe.

CHAPTER V.

"IT is very like him, but not so beautiful. Ah! how beautiful he is," murmured Mademoiselle Margallo to herself. She was in the studio which the Wilfords had temporarily fitted up for her, standing there with her hands behind her back and critically inspecting the very nearly finished bust of Hugo Wilford. The bust was, indeed, very like, and very beautiful too, in its Greek purity of outline and calm serenity of feature. Mademoiselle Margallo moved a little closer to the marble and resumed her inspection. "Very beautiful," she murmured again. The blood mounted to her cheeks and a sudden impulse of the woman thrust aside the critical mood of the artist, and she kissed the cold marble on the lips.

She sat down by the window and let her chin fall into her uplifted palm. The evening sun had set ablaze the dome of St. Sophia, the hundred minarets of the city stood out clear cut against the soft-coloured sky, the red west flushed the unstirred surface of the waters, and a faint breeze carried over them the *muezzin's* call to the Moslem. Mademoiselle Margallo saw and heard, but heeded not. The serenity of the world without was in ill accord with the turbulence of the world within, and the conflict which was going on in her—the conflict between the woman's love and the artist maiden's pride—was all absorbing of attention. Two tears trembled upon her dark eyelashes and rolled down her cheeks. It were hard to say whether they were tears of sorrow or of vexation; something of both, probably.

She was disappointed with herself, ashamed of her weakness.

"Only a commonplace woman after all," she murmured, "that is what I am. I, who had ranked myself as an artist first and as a woman afterwards; a mere woman, to fall in love with a handsome face; a puling school-girl. And it was I who thought to love the beautiful in man, yet remain untouched by the man himself. And is it better or worse that he loves me, this man, this Hugo? Good God! the very sound of his name is sweet in my ear. What a degradation! . . . Better or worse? 'Oh! what a rogue and peasant slave am I!' But so it is, whether

better or worse. And . . . but what I have to do is to sink this trash and go. What shameful tears ! ”

The door of the studio opened and Mrs. Wilford walked in looking somewhat pale and wearied.

“ We are going out in the skiff, Olympe ; will you come with us ? ”

Mademoiselle Margallo did not at once answer, but kept her eyes fixed upon the flushed waters.

“ I don’t know,” she said at last.

“ Olympe, it can’t go on like this.”

“ No, dear. Oh, your very walk, your very attitude, are a reproach to me ; and if it were not for that,” and she pointed at the marble bust, “ I should have been gone long ago.”

“ But, Olympe, that is childish. It were better to shatter the marble into a thousand pieces than to risk breaking our lives.”

“ But why should there be the risk ? ” replied Mademoiselle Margallo impetuously, almost passionately. “ Are we mere puppets, then, with no control of our own over our very selves ? And you speak of breaking the marble, Madge, as if it were but a formless block ; but I have given it life, can’t you understand ? —it would be like breaking part of myself.”

“ Well, never mind about the marble ; I was only speaking metaphorically. But it is useless for you to revolt against being what you are, Olympe ; a woman like the rest of us. The facts of life are too stubborn to be ignored. You have been living so much out of the way of some of them that you have built up for yourself a fanciful theory of life, and here it comes tumbling about your ears at the first touch of reality. You have been living in a world of romance, dear, a thousand miles away from the facts, and there is only one thing to be done : you must get away at once. To any other woman I would have said the same in anger and in . . . in scorn, but I cannot be angry nor scornful with you, dear, for with all your genius and all your cleverness you are in this but a child, Olympe.”

“ Well, that is just it, Madge. If I am different from the usual run of people, why should I not look at life with the regard proper to my individuality ? After all, things are real to us as we see them ; life cannot have exactly the same meaning to every one of us, nor be conducted on exactly the same lines.”

“ Ah, Olympe, but there is just the ‘ one touch of nature ’ which ‘ makes the whole world kin.’ It is useless ; you cannot

dissociate yourself from your womanhood. Dear Olympe, dear daughter of Eve, you are one with us, to suffer and to love."

Mademoiselle Margallo threw her arms round her friend's neck.

"I will go, Madge. Just one more sitting for the sake of the marble, and for the sake of my pride."

CHAPTER VI.

THAT evening at dinner Mademoiselle Margallo announced her intention of at once returning to Paris. "I really must be going," she said, turning to Mr. Wilford, who was trying to dissuade her. "There is the young Sophocles to be got ready for the *Salon*, you know, and there is yet a good deal to be done to him."

"But the *Salon* is still a long way off, my dear Olympe," pleaded Mr. Wilford with an unmistakable accent of tenderness.

A faint blush suffused Mademoiselle Margallo's pale oval face. It was the first time Mr. Wilford had called her by her Christian name. She looked uneasily at Mrs. Wilford, who, however, did not appear to have noticed her husband's indiscretion, if indiscretion it were. "Oh, I must really go, indeed I must," she replied, without adducing any further reason.

"But why?" persisted Mr. Wilford.

There was no answer. Mr. Wilford turned to his wife:

"Madge, can't you persuade Mademoiselle Margallo to stay a little longer?"

There was a faint suggestion of irony in his voice. Mrs. Wilford recognized it, and the fact puzzled and alarmed her. She had noticed, without appearing to notice, but with an inward movement not to be distinguished from indignation, that her husband had addressed Mademoiselle Margallo as "Olympe," as "my dear Olympe," and with a very tender inflexion of voice, and now . . . well, this was very like adding insult to injury.

"I know it is no use trying to dissuade her, Hugo. She has quite made up her mind to go, and she is a very obstinate young person."

There was a long silence. Mrs. Wilford was turning over and over in her mind, not for the first time, every possible and impossible explanation of her husband's conduct in relation to Mademoiselle Margallo. And why not the most obvious explanation? That Mr. Wilford was in love with her? His

attentions had been obvious enough from the very first day of her arrival. Yet the excess of evidence on that point tended to obscure the conclusion. The last person before whom a man makes parade of such a thing is, or should be, his wife. But in this respect Mr. Wilford had all along proceeded with, apparently, cynical, not to say heartless, indifference. Now Mrs. Wilford knew her husband to be neither cynical nor heartless; hence in the very mixed and unpleasant feelings which had been her portion of late, perplexity had had the largest share.

"Well," said Mr. Wilford, at last breaking the silence, which had become noticeably oppressive, and addressing Mademoiselle Margallo, "you will, at all events, finish the bust before you go, won't you? It would be a thousand pities to leave it unfinished."

"Oh, of course. But one good long sitting will be enough. You must give me a couple of hours to-morrow if you can."

"Very well, then; if it must be, it must be, I suppose. I mean about your leaving us. I will arrange to sit for a couple of hours to-morrow."

"Two hours at the outside, Olympe," said Mrs. Wilford. "You will overtire yourself if you work longer than that. I shall come and fetch Hugo away, finished or not, at the end of the time."

For a long time Mr. Wilford sat silent. Mademoiselle Margallo had selected a pose in which the sitter could read with a certain degree of comfort, for reading is an occupation which does not discompose a serene dignity of feature. Conversation was forbidden, because it is liable to disturb the said serenity. Therefore, as has been just observed, Mr. Wilford for a long time sat silent. Towards the end of the sitting, however, he hazarded an observation in the form of a query:

"Tell me, Olympe, why this sudden determination to leave us?"

"It isn't sudden; I have been thinking of it for some time. Do you know that I have been here now more than two months?"

"Et après?"

"Well, is that not enough?"

"No. Why should you go if you like to stay and if we like to keep you?"

"There is my Sophocles."

"Bother the Sophocles. There are eight months yet to the opening of the *Salon*. You can't want so long a time as that."

"There is a great deal to do to it yet. Besides, a visit is a visit, and a visit which has lasted two months has lasted long enough."

"For whom?"

"For all of us, I think," replied Mademoiselle Margallo with great seriousness as she laid down her mallet and chisel.

"I should like to argue that . . . but, indeed, I think you are entire mistaken," and he glanced at her with an enigmatical smile.

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Mademoiselle Margallo with heightened colour.

"I will read you the answer in the palm of your hand, Olympe, if you will give it me."

Mademoiselle Margallo hesitated a moment, then smiling she held out her hand, saying:

"I am afraid I can't *give* it you, although we are in Turkey, but you may read from it if you can."

Mr. Wilford took the proffered hand in his, but he seemed to be listening for something as he murmured over it: "Strong and shapely, the very hand of a sculptor." There was a sound of steps and the rustle of a dress outside the studio door.

Mademoiselle Margallo attempted to withdraw her hand, but Mr. Wilford would not relinquish it, and as his wife entered the room, bent down and put his lips to it.

Mrs. Wilford recoiled in dismay and astonishment. There was no mistaking, from Mademoiselle Margallo's attitude, that she resented the liberty taken. Alone of the three, Mr. Wilford remained entirely calm and self-possessed. Then, releasing Mademoiselle Margallo's hand, he said with a smile:

"Don't look so astonished, my dear fellow-comedians, or is this the very perfection of your acting? This is but the last scene of the little comedy so prettily begun by you two. And, my dear Madge, since one good turn deserves another . . ."

But Mrs. Wilford interrupted him with a sudden exclamation. Mademoiselle Margallo had fainted.

"Run, dear; get some cold water and my salts . . . Oh, Hugo, Hugo, you dear, clever, stupid goose, '*on ne badine pas avec l'amour*.'"

English Beer in the Olden Time.

PROBABLY at no time has so much and such good beer been drunk in this country as at the present day. Beer is now consumed by many people who a few years ago never touched it, whilst at the same time drunkenness is undoubtedly diminishing, and we seem tending more towards the German way of drinking larger quantities of weaker beer than we used to. The light "gravity" or strength, beautiful colour and delicate hop flavour of the "dinner ales" and "tonic bitter beers" now so largely brewed have induced an enormous demand for them, to the benefit alike of brewer, retailer, and consumer. Nothing can well be more wholesome, of course in moderation, than these weak but refreshing and invigorating beverages. Even lighter ones, scarcely containing any alcohol at all, are making their way into public favour, and although they are at present known as "temperance" drinks, they show that modern malt liquors tend to become less and less intoxicating. The great advance in the science of brewing of late years has rendered it possible to brew these beers all the year round with certainty and success, whilst a few years ago the only beers which were not sour in hot weather were strong and heavily hopped; winter-brewed, and of a kind which only strong heads, good digestions and plenty of exercise could cope with.

Modern facilities of transport have also had much to do with the general improvement of beer in our time. People are able to compare local produce with that from more distant centres of brewing, a fact which compels the brewers of a district to do their best to equal their rivals, or see their trade diminish. This active competition is much to the benefit of the beer-drinking public in every way, and ensures the maintenance of a high standard of excellence in a manner probably not otherwise attainable. It may be said that the "tied-house" system tends to neutralize the benefits of competition, and so in theory it does; but practically the opposition of grocers' "off-licences" and of bottled-beer merchants quite restores the balance.

Nor was there ever a time when beer was brewed so universally

from sound and good materials as it is now. The use of sugar, in itself the wholesomest thing in the world, as a partial and limited substitute for malt, contributes immensely to the clear sparkle and brilliancy, and the light and digestible character now considered a *sine quâ non* in all kinds of beer. The outcry about its not constituting "genuine" beer is unreasonable, as cane sugar only differs chemically in the smallest degree from the grape sugar which forms the fermentable part of malt-wort.

The stringent legislation of modern times in the shape of the Adulteration Acts, the certainty with which deleterious substances can be detected in beer, and the uprising of a superior class of brewers to those of former generations, have rendered the use of anything harmful in brewing a thing of the past. At one time, unfortunately, it was not so; brewers and publicans, free from outside competition, and almost as ignorant as their customers, often doctored their beer infamously. In many cases the ingredients used were more nasty than hurtful, but too often they were distinctly prejudicial to the health of habitual consumers. In "the good old times" brewing was a purely empirical art, based upon antiquated traditions and recipes of all sorts. That the more careful and observant brewers often produced good beer is probable enough, but the best of them was working in the dark as to the real nature of his operations.

There still exists a curious old book of the days of George II., written by one who was undoubtedly a practical brewer and well up in the knowledge of his day. After being "concerned in a PUBLIC BREWHOUSE in *London*" for a long time, he seems to have amused himself by travelling all over the country, noting the different kinds of beer brewed; and many curious side-lights he throws upon the customs of the trade in those times. At that period, and for long years afterwards, the great majority of publicans produced home-brewed. Only a few towns contained any breweries, and those mostly of the smallest sort. Farmers, squires, country parsons, all the well-to-do people of the villages and little towns, brewed their own beer; and awfully poor stuff much of it must have been. Their lack of proper appliances was only equalled by the difficulty of procuring good materials, and by their own amazing ignorance of the simplest principles of the art of brewing. The brewer was often a farm labourer, with the profound knowledge and cleanly ways which might be expected

from one of his class. Very frequently a woman was called in to do a day's brewing, much as she might be employed for washing or charing; in fact, there is a precise account of "A Charewoman's Summer Way of Brewing" in one of the chapters of the book in question. The brewing utensils were often used for washing clothes, and no particular trouble was invariably taken to fit them for either operation by careful rinsing and scrubbing-out. The boiled wort, for lack of any sort of refrigerator to reduce it to the proper heat for fermentation, had to stand about for hours in buckets and tubs till some sort of spontaneous fermentation of an unhealthy type set in, and the beer was utterly spoilt. A very common malady of this kind was that called the "fox," in which the beer acquires a disgustingly rank and vulpine odour. Such a thing is now almost unknown, most brewers having never met with a genuine case of "foxed" beer in their lives, but owing to foul and dirty vessels, bad materials, and inordinate delay in the cooling process, it seems to have been the bane of both public and private brewers 150 years ago. So disliked was even the name of the "fox" that any man heard uttering it in a public brewery was fined sixpence. They got over this little difficulty by calling it Reynard. The same fine, by the way, was imposed upon any one using the word "water" instead of "liquor," the technical name by which the foundation of beer is still known to brewers throughout most parts of the country.

The traveller who leisurely jogged along the roads and lanes of rural England a century and a half ago could slake his thirst with a variety of curious malt-drinks, none of which could now be obtained. Not only was beer brewed by a much greater number of persons in proportion to the out-put than is now the case, every one of such persons having his or her own peculiar ideas and nostrums, but different towns and districts had strong local predilections of their own about the kind of beer they liked best. Some of these drinks were no doubt only made up to order, but others were the regular beverages of the place. Amongst the former was "egg-ale," made by putting lean beef, stewed in water, into a cask of ale, with raw eggs having their shells just slightly broken; nutmegs, mace, ginger and a couple of oranges cut in half. The skimmed gravy of the beef was added to the beer, as well as two quarts of "Malaga Sack," the other ingredients, placed in a linen bag, being suspended in the

cask for three weeks. It was then considered fit to bottle, a clove and a lump of sugar being placed in each bottle to "feed and relish it," as if the unfortunate malt-liquor had not been sufficiently messed about. Amongst other notable concoctions of the time were cowslip-ale, made by putting a bushel of cowslip flowers into a barrel of ale; blackberry ale, in which the juice of blackberries was added to the wort before fermentation, and elder-berry beer, to make which elder-berries were boiled in the wort. The directions state that it should be kept in cask about a year before being bottled, when it will be "a most rich Drink that they call *Ebulum*, which has often been preferred to Port-wine for its pleasant Taste and healthful Quality." But perhaps the queerest of these remarkable "consommations" was "Cock-ale." Here is the recipe in full, as its curious mixture of the learning of the brew-house and the kitchen cannot but be spoiled by being turned into modern English. "Take a Cock of half-a-year old, kill him and truss him well and put into a Cask twelve Gallons of Ale, to which add four Pounds of Raisins of the Sun, well pick'd, ston'd, wash'd and dry'd; Dates sliced, Half a Pound; Nutmegs and Mace, two Ounces; Infuse the Dates and Spices in a Quart of Canary twenty-four Hours, then boil the Cock in a Manner to a Jelly, till a Gallon of Water is reduced to two Quarts, then press the Body of him extremely well and put the Liquor into the Cask where the Ale is, with the Spices and Fruit, adding a few Blades of Mace, then put to it Half a Pint of new Ale Yeast and let it work well for a Day, and in two Days you may broach it for Use, or in hot Weather the second Day, and if it proves too strong you may add more plain Ale to palliate this restorative Drink, which contributes much to the Invigorating of Nature." We suppose this wonderful mixture was chiefly used by invalids or convalescent patients; it is difficult to imagine any one in good health wanting it. Even at the present day many local peculiarities exist as to the ordinary public-house beers. For instance, at Nottingham a somewhat deep-coloured beer is preferred, whilst at Sheffield, only forty miles off, it must be as pale as possible. In the latter town, porter is scarcely ever drunk; at Manchester, yet another forty miles, it is highly popular. At Birmingham and in Sussex, ale is stronger than beer; in the West Riding, exactly the reverse is the case. In George II's. time these local customs were still more pronounced,

which is not perhaps to be wondered at, seeing that most people never stirred out of their native county all their lives. One of the most curious of these provincial beers was the Devonshire "White Ale." It was brewed, of course, from pale malt and was chiefly drunk at Plymouth, where indeed it was invented about the year 1680. We are told that "the Alewives whose Province this commonly falls under to manage from the Beginning to the End, are most of them as curious in their brewing it as the Dairy-Woman in making her Butter." As there were few or no cellars in the town "on Account of their stony Foundation, which is all Marble," the white ale was generally fermented or "worked" in the publican's back premises, "in a Row of earthen Steens holding about five or more Gallons each." The fermenting medium was a stuff called "Ripening," the composition of which was kept secret by its vendors but was supposed to be a mixture of malt-flour, yeast and white of egg. A lump of this converted the wort from a "very clear Body into a thick fermenting one, near the Colour and Consistence of Butter'd Ale," and then only was it fit to be drunk. Our friend speaks of this "pleasant Tipple" in rapturous terms and seems to have been quite unable to tear himself away from its seductions. Although looking and tasting somewhat like milk (probably few or no hops were boiled with the wort) the white ale was uncommonly strong, so that "many have undone themselves by drinking it."

Another potation of the time, and one which was even sent from Yorkshire to London, was "oat-ale." The malt, made from oats instead of barley, was mashed with cold water for twelve hours; it does not appear to have been boiled at all, but the usual alcoholic fermentation with yeast was carried out. The hops were simply infused in the cold wort, a method which would extract but little of their special properties. The oat-ale, which it is surprising to learn would keep sound for five or six weeks, drank very smooth, brisk and pleasant and looked like white wine. It was supplied in some of "the great Taverns and Eating-Houses in London, who commonly charge Six-Pence or Eight-Pence a Bottle for it."

It seems to have been not unusual to malt, besides barley, both oats and wheat. Neither are malted now; oats have so large a proportion of husk to kernel that it would not pay to malt them, whilst although wheat yields even a larger extract

than barley, the thinness and tenderness of its skin makes it difficult to grow on the malt-house floor. Barley presents the happy medium between these extremes, and long experience amply proves that no grain which can be raised in this country is so well suited for making into malt.

As probably many readers do not understand either the theory or the practice of malting, it may briefly be said that its object is to provide a suitable medium from which a "wort," or juice, can be extracted. Unless the grain is malted it will not yield, when ground and mashed with hot water in the mash-tun, a sufficiently sugary wort to be of any use. The change takes place during malting, and is brought about by the inherent vital power of the grain itself. Instead of being planted in the earth to grow, it is made to grow above ground; but the growth is suddenly cut short at a stage far short of that which would be reached in the open field. The threshed grain is first sunk in a "steep" or cistern, full of cold water, for about forty-eight hours, then thrown out into a heaped mass called the "couch," till its dawning vitality, aroused by the soaking, generates a little warmth. After some twenty-four hours it is spread a few inches thick upon a tiled or cemented floor and allowed to sprout slightly. At one end of the grain appears a small white shoot, which would grow into a tall stalk if allowed to; at the other a few small tendrils, which are the roots. When the shoot, or "acrospire," has grown, in about ten or twelve days' time, to an extent which experience shows is sufficient, but wherein knowledge and skill in treating different barleys is of supreme importance, the growing barley is put upon a kiln of wire or perforated tiles and dried by the heat of a large fire beneath. When this process is finished, whereby of course all further growth is stopped, we have "malt," as distinguished from barley. No expense or trouble is spared nowadays by the large brewers and maltsters to obtain the best malt from the best barley, recognising as they do that really good beer entirely depends upon good malt in the long run.

The practice of malting a century and a half ago seems to have differed little from that of the present day except in the important matter of fuel for "drying-off." It was then generally necessary to use whatever the locality produced, whether wood, coal, fern, straw, or even furze cut on the great commons, then extending over immense areas. These various fuels gave peculiar flavours

to the beer, some of them unpleasant enough probably ; but in most cases, no doubt, people got used to them.

A highly characteristic touch of the spirit of the eighteenth century is afforded by the statement that somebody dried his malt "on the leads of a church," by the heat of the sun. Another "nice person" also dried his on a leaded roof, through glass windows, by the solar rays ; but certainly the malt of both these "eminent curious Gentlemen" would be very insufficiently cured and yield only a cloudy and badly-keeping beer.

However, malt seems to have been abundant, cheap and fairly good, as a rule, and when not infested with weevils was apparently the most generally satisfactory of the brewing materials. The ravages of the "weevil, whool, black-bob or creeper," though not uncommon even now in badly-kept maltings, are always kept within due bounds by frequently screening or riddling the malt, white-washing the binns, or burning sulphur. If once they get into a large heap of malt which lies undisturbed for any length of time they will eat up an immense amount of it, doing their mischievous work inside the grain, which appears all right to the inexperienced eye when it may be perfectly hollow and empty. Some of the ignorant and careless maltsters of the old time seem to have been troubled by this pest to an extraordinary degree, for our friend states that some one, finding vast numbers of them crawling in his malt, nevertheless mashed it, but was "in such Pain from the foetid Stink of the Weevils he could hardly bear his Nose over the Place, and resolved never to brew there a second Time." He further says that "where they are in Abundance, they will bite a Person in Bed, haunt the Cup-board and even feed on the Plates where Meat has been eaten ;" but assuredly no one nowadays is ever bitten in bed or anywhere else by this very exceptional plague. How beer brewed from really weevilly malt tasted is perhaps best left to the imagination.

Hops, unlike malt, were decidedly dear as a rule, except in the districts where they were grown. The carriage to other parts of the country added so much to the cost that as few as possible were used, and those few were boiled over and over again till everything that was good and much that was otherwise was got out of them. As a natural consequence of the dearth of hops, other bittering agents were largely employed, such as wormwood, hore-hound, daucus or wild carrot seed, things not unwholesome

in themselves if used with the knowledge and judgment which was but too seldom possessed by those who employed them. Nothing can equal the flavour of good hops, and it is only in very dear seasons, and then to a limited extent, that any other vegetable bitter is used at the present time to eke out the *humulus lupulus* or common hop.

But perhaps water was the subject of the greatest ignorance and the wildest empiricism of the old days. Absolutely no means existed of definitely proving whether a water was good or bad. A common notion existed that pond or river waters were best for brewing, chiefly because a slightly larger extract can usually be obtained with soft water than with hard. We are pleasantly informed that "putrid Water, though nauseous, is not observed to be hurtful to human Bodies," and that "the *Thames* Water at *London* is fattened by the Washings of Hills and the Sullidge of Streets, which give it a thick Body and muddy Taste, and therefore it fines well and makes most Drink with least Malt." The *Thames* water, in fact, taken up at *Greenwich* when the tide was running out, was the favourite source of supply for use on ship-board; it was said "to Stink two or three Times in an *East India* voyage, and at last, upon opening the Bung, will send forth a fine Spirit of an inflammable Nature." The carbonic acid gas in some spring waters was thought to be the "spirit" of the water, and many were the vain endeavours made to retain it.

Probably not a brewer in the kingdom now uses either pond or river water, except, of course, so far as the latter may be the local town-supply filtered through sand or gravel beds. It is often supposed that the *Burton* brewers use the *Trent* water—a complete mistake, as all the brewers obtain their supplies from deep artesian or tube wells. *Burton* does not seem to have been noted for its beer in *George II.*'s time, but its neighbours, *Nottingham* and *Derby*, were more celebrated then than now for the excellence of their malt liquors and the skill of their "ale-drapers" and "ale-wives."

All sorts of nefarious adulterants were used in brewing in old times with perfect impunity. Most of these were designed to make the beer seem stronger than it really was, others to give it a fictitiously creamy head, whilst flour and salt were often added in the cask to cause both a sparkling appearance in the beer and much thirst in the drinker. The powerful narcotic *Cocculus*

Indicus was often used for "making Drink heady and saving the Expense of Malt ;" so also was coriander seed, one pound of which was said to equal a bushel of malt. Cockle and grains of paradise, darnel and other highly objectionable things were constantly employed by rascally publicans, who also were much addicted to the practice of beating the yeast over and over again into the fermenting wort, trusting that the sharp flavour of it would be mistaken for true alcoholic strength.

There seems to have been a great lack of light but refreshing and wholesome beers of the kind now so highly popular. There was good reason for this. Such beers require the best materials and the highest skill, and neither could often be obtained. To keep them sound in warm weather would have required more hops than their cost would have permitted, whilst the modern use of harmless preservative agents, such as salicylic acid, bisulphite of lime, etc., in infinitesimal quantities, was quite unknown. Practically, only very heady old ale and dreadfully weak small-beer could be obtained at most of the inns and publichouses of the early Georgian era. The small-beer was usually made from the very last runnings of the mash-tun, boiled with the spent hops of the strong beer, and must rarely have been either bright or sound. It was usual to keep the former one, two or even three years before tapping it, by which time it would in most cases be decidedly acid or "aged," a kind of beer still popular in the West of England. Such beers are by no means very wholesome for habitual consumption in considerable quantity, and our old friend, the London and Country Brewer, states that he met with, during his four years' peregrinations all over the country, "for above a hundred miles together, for their best Drink, pale harsh stale Butt Beer ; in another Part, for near that Length, a brown, sharp stale Butt Beer, in both of which I have seen several miserable Spectacles, some with their Fingers standing a-strut, others with their Feet in Flannels, others walking with two Sticks, and all occasioned by the Gout, bred by constantly drinking these crabbed Liquors." Much of the west-country beer, especially in the cider districts, where it was vatted for long periods, used to make your eyes water with its sharpness. The taste for old beer is now going out everywhere, however, much to the advantage of both brewer and consumer.

People dearly loved strong drink in old days, to an extent

scarcely credible now. Everybody drank hard, and teetotallers would indeed have had an uncomfortable time. Besides spending every evening of their lives over hot punch, fiery port, brandy, and tremendously strong old beer, they would add ginger, pepper and what not to their drinks till one wonders how they could possibly have swallowed them. As a natural consequence, inflammatory diseases of all kinds were rife, and to prevent, as they thought, the re-appearance of these maladies in their offspring, many persons cruelly deprived their children of flesh meat, "to that Degree that I have known a Boy and Girl petition the Servants for a morsel of Fowl." These strong old beers went by various names, Stout-Beer (not what we call stout), Nog, Stitch, Old-boy, etc., and were especially popular in Kent. At Rochester, indeed, they brewed a beer "which is potent enough, if that would do, to keep off the Seizure of an Ague, but woe to the Patient if he can get no other than such Drink in the hot Fit!"

Many private persons devoted much attention to the art of brewing for their own domestic consumption. Unfortunately, however, in many cases their trouble was sadly wasted. Besides the inherent difficulties of brewing on the very small scale, such as regulating the heats of the standing mash and of the fermenting wort, some of their notions were of the most outrageous and extraordinary kind. One of these *virtuosos* would throw burning logs of beechwood into his boiling wort, "believing that these Firebrands fined, mellowed and added Strength to the Drink." Another, and this, it is sad to say, was a lady-brewer, boiled up all the sediments or "bottoms" of the empty casks in each brewing, whilst "an eminent physician" treats us to a fad of brewing without boiling at all, thorough boiling being one of the most absolutely essential of all things in the production of drinkable beer.

However, it is plain that much of the unwholesomeness of the beer of those days was due to the uneducated taste of the consumers themselves. They actually liked to drink it whilst still yeasty, in which state it would be horribly bitter and nauseous and strongly purgative. Individuals termed "firkin-men" used to bring small casks or firkins of their own to the breweries, get them filled with beer brewed only the day before and totally unfit for consumption, and go off to retail them to their ignorant and besotted customers. These firkin-men do not seem to have

enjoyed a very high reputation for honesty—they gave short measure and cheated in every way they could think of, so that we are warned of the bad end of one of them, “who, though he carried on his Frauds to a great Degree for a long Time, lately died very miserably poor and distracted.”

This must conclude with a delightful example of our authors' *naïveté*. He relates how “a Gentleman's Servant having an Assignment with a pretty Girl,” was in such a hurry to get away to his *inamorata* that he added the yeast when his wort was much too warm and consequently spoilt his brew, although by skilful “faking” he got it afterwards into saleable condition.

It is pleasant to think, that the English beer-drinker of the present day may congratulate himself on the fact that the national beverage (and long may it remain so) was never better brewed and more wholesome than it is now. The improvement has been brought about chiefly by competition between brewers, and now that the public taste has been educated to know what good beer should be and can be, it is little likely indeed that it will ever again put up with the unwholesome, doctored stuff which was but too often miscalled beer in the days of the Georges.

W. B. PALEY.

On the Voyage Home.

THE S.S. "Norway" was lying in the Bombay docks, her decks flooded with moonlight, such moonlight as one never seems to see north of Suez. There were very few people about on board ; most of them were busy getting things ready in their cabins, trying vainly to make boxes go into impossible places and wondering irritably why those misguided people who built steamers did not make them bigger whilst they were about it.

Away near the stern stood a tall, slight woman, her hands lying lightly on the railing in front of her, her eyes looking out over the moonlit sea. She had no hat on, and the moon, shining steadily overhead, showed a glint of fair hair and the pretty graceful lines of a girlish figure. She never moved, except now and then to strike the white ringless hands together with a passionate little gesture. The life which stretched before her when this voyage was over, held no bright, warm hopes, no dream of happy meetings, no vision of a loving welcome home ; all the future was dark, and there seemed nothing but misery on ahead. Her thoughts wandered back to the day when she had first seen Bombay. The sunshine and brightness had fascinated her to such an extent that she had laughingly declared she loved India so much she would never leave it. And now? God knew she never wished to see it again, for was it not there that she had learnt the bitterest lesson a woman could learn? Ah! well, she would try and forget. Try and forget! She glanced over her shoulder apprehensively as some one walked towards her, then the footsteps died away again.

Try and forget! She laughed as if in scorn of herself. Forget! Her grasp on the railing tightened, and a look of utter misery came into the sad dark eyes, a fear of that past that lay hidden away from all save those few who knew her life and—pitied her. She shivered. Was she afraid still? Would she carry that fear with her till she died? She was safe here, surely she was safe here ; no one on board knew her ; she had seen the list of passengers, and it had shown only strangers' names. Again that frightened backward glance over her shoulder. A

man was coming towards her, but he turned aside and leant against the railing some ten yards off, singing softly to himself :

"I swear to be good and true to the maid whom I fondly adore."

She shivered again. Why, oh, why did he come and sing that where *she* could hear it? Was *any one* good? Was *any one* true? She could not stand there and listen, she felt it would drive her mad, so she turned quickly and walked across to the other side of the deck out of ear-shot.

"I swear to be good and true, I swear to be good and true."

Over and over again the words repeated themselves. She gave a curious little laugh, and nervously ran the fingers of her right hand across her left wrist and felt for something there, but—it had gone. She uttered a little cry of dismay and retraced her footsteps, her eyes bent upon the ground, until she reached the place where she had been standing when the familiar song drove her away. There were deep shadows here and there, so she knelt down to see more clearly and began searching, when she heard a voice behind her, saying :

"I am afraid you have lost something. Can I help you to find it?"

She looked up and saw it was the man who had unwittingly called up for her such a host of bitter memories. His face was in shadow, but the tone was courteous and well-bred.

"It is only ——" and she hesitated, "only—a piece of velvet with a diamond stud in it. I have never dropped it before."

Then she turned away from him abruptly, forgetting the sudden wave of crimson which rose to her cheeks would have passed unnoticed in the moonlight. Never dropped it before! Had she *really* only worn it for a few days?

"I see something lying over there, I think," and he walked away, then bent down and picked up something. "Yes. Here it is," and he held it towards her.

It was a band of velvet about three inches wide, with a little diamond stud passed through a button-hole at one end.

"Oh! thank you so much," and the relief in her voice was evident as she stretched out her right hand eagerly for it. "I am so grateful to you for finding it. I wonder what time it is?" She went on, evidently wishful to change the subject. He walked to the smoking-room door, where a lamp was burning,

and pulled out his watch, and she followed him, glancing up at his face as he did so.

"Just nine," he answered, looking back at her.

"Time to go to bed. Good-night," and giving him a little bow, she passed through the door, and he saw her disappear down the companion ladder a moment afterwards.

She reached her cabin and peeped cautiously in. Wonderful to relate, it was empty.

Taking the velvet band she passed it round her left wrist, fastening the two ends together with the little stud.

"What a mercy it was I didn't drop it in the daylight," she murmured to herself. "I really must take care not to do it again; what would they all think? They would never guess the truth, at any rate, they couldn't do that," and again she clasped her wrist lightly with her right hand, whilst a look of such utter hatred and fear came into the sweet girlish face that it altered it almost beyond recognition. Then she hid her face for a moment in her hands, as she prayed with her whole soul that she might at least find peace from that haunting fear, in the dear old land over the sea.

A coolish wind, a hot sun, and a sea like glass.

Captain Owen lay back in his chair and smoked. He had taken up a position which enabled him to get a good view of the girl who had attracted his notice the night before.

She was leaning back in her chair, a book lying unread in her lap, whilst her eyes looked out into the distance. He wondered vaguely to himself of what she was thinking. Surely they could not be very pleasant thoughts to bring that curiously-pained contraction to brow and lips. Miss Murray, the captain had called her at breakfast that morning. Perhaps she belonged to "Bill" Murray, colonel of the 205th; he had a grown-up daughter.

He opened his book, impatient with himself for feeling this uncalled-for interest in a woman he had not exchanged a dozen words with, and read with a determination worthy of a better cause until the tiffin bell rang. After tiffin every one sat on deck and slept the sleep of the just, except Miss Murray, who wrote letters, balancing a writing-pad on her knee, in the way women love to do. A child came running round her chair, jerked her elbow and away went her inkstand, a black stream flowing sweetly over the deck.

"Oh, bother!" she exclaimed, jumping to her feet, and hastily disposing of her writing paraphernalia, she began tearing up bits of blotting paper and throwing them into the inky little river.

Tom Owen, who had been peacefully dozing, woke up at this juncture, and coming across the deck said gravely, but with a laugh in his eyes:

"Please spare your blotting paper. I don't fancy this steamer boasts many resources of that kind. I'll call one of the stewards to come and wipe it up."

"Thank you so much; please do."

And he walked away, then came back and stood leaning with his back to the railing, looking down at her. She had gone back to her chair again, and was trying to dip her pen right through the bottom of the ink-bottle, in her endeavour to find some few remaining drops.

Suddenly she looked up at him and smiled. Such a smile! All the sadness in her face disappeared, the lips lost that hard, almost defiant look; and her eyes! Yes, her eyes were glorious! The thought flashed through Tom Owen's mind that he would give a good deal to be able often to bring that smile to her face.

"*'A friend in need is a friend indeed,'*" she quoted, with a little laugh. "Thank you so much for coming to the rescue, it is such an awful mess. I hope the captain won't have me up for damaging his ship. But it wasn't really all my fault, a child came running round and jogged my elbow, and—then——" and she paused tragically.

"Show me the child and I will severely chastise it, provided its mother is nowhere to be seen, as in that case she might chastise me, you know."

Blanche Murray laughed.

"I don't think she could hurt you very much," glancing at the broad shoulders and strongly-built figure. "*I* should be more sorry for the child."

"Misplaced sympathy, indeed," in a would-be injured tone. "Do you want to go on writing, or may I sit down and talk to you?"

She said she was tired of writing, they were only business letters, so he sat down near her and they talked.

"I've just come from Lucknow," he said, in answer to her question, asking him what part of India he had come from. "Have you ever been there? I never remember seeing you,

and I've been there with my regiment for two years now." He paused for a moment, and as no answer came, asked: "Perhaps you don't know the north-west?"

"No."

"The Punjab?"

"No."

"Madras?"

A shake of her head.

He hesitated a moment, but his curiosity got the better of him.

"Where have you spent most of your time out here?"

He was watching her intently, admiring the well-cut nose and the delicate curves of the pretty, determined mouth and chin. She raised her eyes quickly, and as she did so she turned white to her very lips, grasping the arms of her chair with both her hands. Involuntarily, Tom Owen turned his head in the direction in which she was looking, and saw a tall thin man leaning against the smoking-room door, looking out to sea, a pipe in his mouth and his hands in his pockets.

Owen looked back at his companion inquiringly, but the colour had come back to her face, and save for the nervous tapping of her fingers on the arms of her chair, she showed no signs of emotion.

"You were asking——?" she began.

"Where you had spent most of your time out here."

There was just a moment's pause before she answered, then:

"I have been in Burma most of the time," she said, "in far-away places no one ever even heard of, or wants to hear of," with a hard little laugh that jarred on him, though he could not tell why. "Where one hardly sees a European for weeks together, and when you do see them you wish you hadn't! Rangoon, the only big station I was ever in out there, was different. Rangoon was heaven compared to those other places."

Then she turned the conversation to other things, and try as he would he could not get her to say another word about herself.

The tiffin bell rang, and as Captain Owen followed Miss Murray a few minutes later into the saloon, the man whom he had noticed on deck came forward and held out his hand.

"How d'ye do?" he said, looking down at her. "How curious you and I should be fellow-travellers, isn't it?"

The sneer was scarcely perceptible, but the girl to whom it was addressed read between the lines only too well.

‘Very,’ she answered almost defiantly, calmly ignoring the outstretched hand, and with her head thrown up a little more proudly than usual, she brushed past him to her place at the table.

‘Hulloh ! so she knows him. Wonder who he is. Looks ~~an~~ awful brute, I must say,’ mused Tom, ~~as he helped himself to cold beef.~~ ‘By Jove ! how frightened she looked when he spoke to her. Poor little girl !’

Another beautiful moonlight night. Blanche Murray sat in her stifflingly hot little cabin until she could bear the heat no longer and went on deck. Owen was standing with his back to the railing smoking. He had been watching for her for the last hour.

She stood near the door of the smoking-room for a moment and he walked up to her.

She started and a look so full of fear that it hurt him to see it came into her face.

‘Oh, it is you !’ she said gently, looking up at him ; ‘it is so difficult to recognize people in this light.’

‘Come and sit down, will you ? It is so jolly and cool up here now. How any one can exist downstairs beats me.’

They found a seat near the stern and sat down together.

‘Have you discovered who most of the passengers are by now ? I always think it is rather fun trying to make out who is who. I see you know the man who is called Campbell. What is he ? He doesn’t look as if he was in the service.’

He asked the question after they had been talking for some time, and though he had wished to ask it sooner, had not liked to do so. He felt he must know what was the connection between these two, and learn some explanation of that frightened look he had seen on her face twice already that day.

‘Yes ; I knew him in Burma. He is in the Civil Service,’ she answered rather shortly.

At that moment Campbell passed and, standing still for a moment, scrutinized them carefully in the moonlight.

‘Ah ! so it is Miss Murray,’ he said, with a disagreeable laugh and a curious emphasis on the name. ‘What a lovely moonlight night, isn’t it ? I love the moonlight, though I can understand it must be most inconvenient at times. Don’t you think so ?’

‘Yes,’ she answered very quietly, ‘most inconvenient. One hears such thrilling stories, of wretched prisoners trying to escape,

and of men who have to cross an enemy's country, in which the moon plays anything but a kind part."

"Exactly, for any one trying to escape! It must be most trying, mustn't it, Miss Murray?"

"Isn't that just what Miss Murray has said?" broke in Tom Owen impatiently. He felt that Campbell was annoying her, though he was at a loss to guess why.

The other man looked down at him, then turning to Blanche asked with a sneer:

"May I learn the name of your champion?"

His impertinent tone made Tom's blood boil.

"My name is Owen, and if ever Miss Murray is in want of a 'champion,' I shall be most happy to fill the post," he answered coolly, but the other read the challenge in his tone.

"Miss Murray is indeed honoured," he said ironically. "It really sounds quite romantic. The effect of the moonlight, I suppose," and turning on his heel he walked away.

"What an impertinent brute the man is," Tom began angrily, then stopped short. "I beg your pardon—I forgot—he is a friend of yours?"

"A friend of mine! No! No! I—I——" she broke off suddenly. "The moon is nearly full now," she said nervously, "isn't it?"

He did not answer. He was disappointed, more than he cared to own at the sudden cold reserve in her tone. A few minutes after she got up, and wishing him "good-night," left him to his thoughts, which were not wholly pleasant ones.

The weather was lovely, and the days passed all too quickly for two people on board.

Captain Owen had been true to his word and had indeed proved himself Blanche Murray's champion. Hardly a day passed but he saved her from some petty annoyance at Campbell's hands. The latter would try repeatedly to get her to himself, but Owen knew intuitively that she hated being alone with the man, and in his well-bred, casual way would never hesitate to put an end to these *tête-à-têtes*, thereby gaining Campbell's cordial dislike, which did not affect him in the least.

And Blanche Murray, as she knelt morning and evening in the stuffy little cabin, thanked God that he had sent this man to befriend and take care of her, as she had never before been cared

for in all her young life ; and then she would break off suddenly in her prayer, wondering hopelessly if, after all, this friendship was not the greatest curse that had ever yet come upon her.

They were nearing Marseilles, and in a few days would be in port, and then ? Tom Owen asked himself the question with a sigh of regret, as he looked up into the star-lit sky and then back again to the tall, graceful figure at his side. The nights were comparatively cold now, and Blanche shivered as she drew her cloak more closely round her. He noticed it, as he always noticed her slightest gesture.

"I'll go and fetch you a rug," he said ; "it's quite early, it really is, only half-past seven ; you can't go to bed yet, you know, and they are making such an awful row in the saloon," for she seldom came on deck after dinner now that the heat in the saloon was tolerable, preferring, for reasons best known to herself, to stay and listen to excruciatingly bad playing and still worse singing. "Please stay here until I come back."

She nodded her acquiescence. He came back in a few minutes with a rug, and drawing up a chair he made her sit down and, after wrapping her up carefully, sat down near her.

"I hate to think," he began, breaking the silence at last, "that this voyage is coming to an end so soon. Goodness only knows when I shall see you again ; you will give me your home address, won't you ? You won't let me lose sight of you ? I can't tell you——"

"Captain Owen," she interrupted hurriedly, "don't ask me where I am going—for I—don't know."

"Don't know where you are going !" he echoed in surprise ; "but surely——"

"You have always been so kind to me," she went on pleadingly ; "I know you will prove so still. For God's sake, let me go without asking me any questions. This time next week we shall have gone our different ways, and all this voyage will be—as if it had never been."

It was too dark for her to see his face distinctly, but his tone was full of pain as he answered :

"Can't you trust me, child ? You know I don't want to force your confidence, but I would do anything I could to help you. I know you are in trouble, though you have never told me one word of yourself. Won't you let me be your friend ?"

"No! No! It can't be; God knows I wish it could be otherwise," with a quiver in her voice, "but it can't."

"Won't you tell me just one thing?" he asked bending towards her. "Why are you so frightened of that hound?"

"Frightened—I—of——?"

"Of Mr. Campbell," he interrupted sternly; "you know who I mean quite well. Do you think through all these days I have never noticed how you start at the mention of his name? how you grow white when you think he is coming near you? Oh! child! child!" he broke off passionately. "Why don't you trust me; you must know——" he stopped short, as he heard a man's footsteps coming towards them.

"Miss Murray, you have indeed found a secluded nook," said Campbell in the familiar tone it jarred so on Tom Owen to hear him use to her. "What a pity these charming evenings will so soon be at an end, isn't it? for you and Captain Owen, that is to say; I fancy it is rather lucky for some one else, eh? Ah! you have dropped something? What! that piece of black velvet you are so fond of wearing as a bracelet? A very curious fancy, isn't it, Owen? I once heard of a woman who was tied to a heavy chest by a dog-chain fastened to her——What! going already, Miss Murray!" as the girl rose suddenly to her feet. "Such a lovely evening too, it seems a pity to go down. So sorry you insist on leaving us. Good-night, and—pleasant dreams. I'll tell you my little story another time, if you will remind me," raising his voice as she walked away.

Owen followed her quckly.

"Why are you going? He is a horrid, impertinent brute, but I don't think he *meant* to annoy you then."

"Didn't *mean* to annoy me," and she laughed bitterly. "Oh, no; of course he didn't! of course he didn't!"

The lamp from the smoking-room threw the light on to her face.

"You are as white as a sheet, child. What is the matter? Can't I help you?" he asked earnestly, looking down at her.

"No no. No one can help me. I am—past help. Good-night, and—thank you," and in a moment she had gone.

It was the most perfect morning, cool and bright, and as Blanche came on deck, she uttered a cry of delight.

On one side lay the coast of Italy, so near that she felt she

could touch it with her hand ; on the other, Sicily, bathed in sunlight, its vine-clad hills sloping down to the water, and its trim white villas peeping out from amongst the trees. Presently, as they got into more open water, she saw Etna standing out stern and clear against the pale morning sky, whilst far away in the distance Stromboli lay, resting like some great cloud upon the sea.

She stood looking out over the water, as she had stood that first evening in Bombay harbour. Her eyes were sadder, her fear greater, her longing for peace and rest more intense than it had been then. The future was so dark she dared not glance ahead. And the past? Well, that would not bear looking into either. Her thoughts wandered back to her childhood and girlhood. Brought up by an aunt who cared nothing for her, and whose evident relief when Blanche was old enough to join her father in India was plain enough to see. A few weeks of happiness, then came her greatest grief: her father died. She laughed oddly. Was *that* grief compared to the load of misery that was hers now? And now?

Tom Owen's handsome face, with the kind blue eyes came before her. How good he was to her; how thoughtful he was for her always in a hundred little ways. And some women—Oh, God! was it just?—some women could count upon such tender care as that through all their lives, sheltered from all sorrow and trouble, whilst she—she had to stand alone, unaided, unprotected.

"Good-morning!"—it was Campbell's voice, and seemed to fit in well with her misery. "You are up very early this morning. How disappointed Captain Owen will be to have missed this opportunity. You should have told him last night when to come up. I am sure he would have been dressed at sunrise to please you," he ended, with an impertinent laugh.

A wave of crimson passed over the girl's face, and she made a movement as if to walk away, but he put out his hand and held her by her left wrist.

"Look here," he said angrily, "you've got to stay and listen to what I've got to say. I won't be treated in this way any longer, and if you go on in the way you have been doing I'll tell every one on board about *that*," holding up her wrist, then letting it drop.

"I always knew," she answered very quietly, all the colour gone from her face, "that you were a coward; now I know you are a bully too. I ought to have known what to have expected at your hands. I imagined—wrongly, I admit—that there might be some

spark of honour or gentlemanly feeling left in you. You see I was mistaken."

He looked down at her half-angrily, half-admiringly, baffled by her perfect self-possession.

"You treat me very cruelly, Blanche," he began.

"Blanche is not the name for *you* to use," she interrupted haughtily; "remember that, if you please."

"At any rate you have no right to the one *you* use," he rejoined with a sneer. "Forgive me," breaking off with a sudden change of voice; "you know I am hurt and angry. I love you so well, so dearly——"

"How dare you speak——"

"Because I love you!"

"And I—I hate you!" she cried angrily, her eyes ablaze. "Because I am alone and unprotected am I to be treated in this way?"

"I love you," he repeated doggedly. "I loved you before—before—— Curse him!" he muttered between his teeth. "You never would listen to me then, and later on he misunderstood—yes, misunderstood." And he laughed contemptuously. "He thought you loved *me* then, and I let him think it. Why not? I almost hated you then; I would have done anything to hurt you, and I *will* do anything I can, too, unless I can win you for myself."

She felt his hot breath on her cheek, as he thrust his face down to hers, and she recoiled as if she had been stung.

"What do you mean?" she cried. "Not that! not that! You say you love me, and yet you would send me back to that life," and she shuddered, "or else—ruin me!"

"Hush! don't get into such a state of mind," he put in hastily; "some one may hear you. You women always get so tragical; and, after all," with another sneer, "I am only making love to you instead of Captain Owen; he is always——"

"It is a lie," she burst out passionately; "a wicked lie. He is kind, and I have appreciated his kindness, that is all. Made love to me. Good God! How dare you insult me in this way! What have I ever done, through the last few years you have known me, ever to justify such a charge as that? And now—because you know I have placed myself in a false position; because you see I am utterly unprotected—you come to threaten and insult me. Ah, you are, indeed, most generous. Think what you like, it can make no difference to the truth. If all

men were like Captain Owen, there would be no lives like mine."

"Your life will be no easier by trying to make me jealous," he said meaningly. "I give you until we get to Marseilles, which will be some time to-morrow, to decide. If you decide for me you shall never regret it. I have always loved you, and will spend my life in trying to make you happy. I will——"

"If you are determined to insult me, I cannot stop you," she interrupted very quietly. "Yes?"

"And if you do not do as I wish," he rejoined, growing angry, "I will, as soon as we reach Marseilles, telegraph to—Burma; and all your future movements will be known there too."

"How can you be so cruel?" And the tone was almost a wail in its agony. "You, who know what my life was; who have seen how I was treated; you, who know of—this," touching the velvet band on her wrist; "oh, no one could be so utterly cruel, knowing all this, to——"

"Can't you understand that it is only that that gives me any power over you? Call me anything you like, but I stick to my resolve. As I said before, you shall never regret deciding for me, but if you don't—well, I shall do as I said. You understand?"

For a moment no answer came. Her lips were white and drawn, and the eyes looking up at him were so full of terror that even he could not bear to see them, and turned his head away.

"Yes—I—understand," she said slowly, as if the words hurt her; "and I tell you," drawing herself up, all the fear in her face giving way to contempt, "to—telegraph to Burma." And without another word she walked away and left him.

Miss Murray was not at either breakfast or luncheon. Tom Owen, on asking the stewardess what was the matter, was told that "Miss Murray had been packing, and had a very bad head-ache." Half-past five came; he could stand it no longer, and scribbling off a little note, sent it to her cabin.

The note ran thus:

"DEAR MISS MURRAY,

"I am so sorry to hear you have a head-ache. Do come up on deck after dinner; the cool air will do it good.

"Yours sincerely,

"T. OWEN."

She sat looking down at the piece of paper in her hand, as thought after thought chased each other through her mind. Yes, she would go. He would never guess the pain it was to feel it was the last time he would talk to her; only her own heart knew this new bitterness. He only looked upon her as a friend, and—to-morrow she would lose him for ever. Yes, she would go.

The dinner-bell rang before she had changed her dress, the consequence being that she was ten minutes late. Owen watched her as she made her apologies to the captain. She was usually rather pale, but to-night the colour in her cheeks was lovely, and her eyes seemed larger and more brilliant than he had ever seen them. She talked incessantly, and, although down at his end of the table he could not hear what was said, he gathered from the laughter that went on round her that she was the life of the party. Just once she turned her head in his direction, and for a moment her eyes held his with a look he could not understand, for it seemed to have no part in the merriment around her.

"At last," he said, as she joined him on deck after dinner. "I thought you were going to shut yourself up and never let us speak to you again. Have you got enough cloaks and things on? It is really awfully cold to-night."

"Yes, thank you; heaps."

"Then come along and sit down on the seat near the stern. It is nice and quiet up there, and we can talk comfortably. Well," after he had wrapped a rug round her, "how's your head?"

"It feels like a live coal," she answered with a little laugh, such a tired little laugh.

"I am *so* sorry. You have been packing, haven't you? And that's always tiring work; and then you are unhappy into the bargain. I wish," he added wistfully, "you would tell me what is bothering you?"

"Lots of things, but I can't tell you them—— What does it matter? No one cares."

The moment the words were out of her mouth she regretted them.

"No one cares? No one cares? Why do you say that?" and he bent down towards her, but he could not tell the expression of her face in the darkness. "Why, you know, you must know, that *I* care, that what troubles *you* matters more to me

than anything in this wide world. I love you, child, I love you ; but I never dared, tell you before, because you always held me at arm's length, and showed me so plainly you did not want to tell me anything about yourself. But you were lonely and unhappy. I knew that, just—because I loved you, and I have tried to shield you from that brute because I knew he frightened you. Won't you say something to me ? Blanche, Blanche, what is it, dear ?" for she had turned away and covered her face with her hands. "Are you angry with me ? I am sorry if I have bothered you, but I couldn't help telling you. You said no one cared, and I care so much that nothing else in heaven or earth seems to matter. I couldn't bear you to say that. Speak to me, won't you ? If you don't want me to say anything more I won't, but I hoped you might learn to care, too, some day."

Learn to care, too, some day ! Some day ! When she loved him now, *now*, with the whole strength of her heart. She dropped her hands into her lap and looked out into the darkness. She had forgotten everything, everything. The past with its misery faded away and left her standing face to face with this reality—he loved her—he loved her. It was the supreme moment of her life, and she sat motionless as she drank deep of that intoxicating gladness which swept across her heart.

"Do you care for me, Blanche ?"

The words seemed to mingle with her thoughts, and with a swift glad gesture she put her hands into his.

"God knows I do !"

That passionate cry of hers recalled her to herself. She had forgotten. Forgotten that the love he offered her must be refused—forgotten that between his life and hers was a barrier built that nothing could break down, forgotten that the love she gave him was—a sin.

He was holding her hands tight in both his own, looking down into the pale face so close to his.

"My darling," he began——

"Oh stop ! for pity's sake, stop !" He dropped her hands in surprise and drew back a little. "You—you—must not talk to me like that," she went on piteously ; "it is wrong, it is wrong. Let me go, and never speak to me again. Oh, don't ask me to tell you why. I cannot. I *cannot*."

"But you told me just now you cared for me, you——"

"And so I do!" she interrupted fiercely. "Care! Oh! I never knew what it was to care before. I never knew one could care—like this," and her voice sank to a whisper. "Remember," she added, "remember *that*, whatever you may hear of me in the days to come."

They neither of them spoke for a minute, then she went on quickly :

"But oh! I never guessed *you* cared, or I would never have spoken to you even. I only thought," and her voice was full of pleading—as if *he* blamed her!—"I only thought you were sorry for me. To-morrow—to-morrow—I knew you would go away, and I should never see you again. You were so kind—so kind—but believe me I never dreamt you loved me."

"I don't understand," he said very gently. "You love me, I love you. Surely you will tell me what there is between us."

"I cannot, not now. To-morrow, if I can"—an odd thought flashed across her mind—"I will tell you. I must go now, I am so tired."

He walked with her to the top of the companion ladder.

"I hope you will sleep well, and have a good night," he said.

She laughed oddly.

"I think I shall have a good night," then, with a change of tone, "There is only one little girl of fourteen in my cabin, and she is always as good as gold, and never disturbs me. Good-night."

She held out her hand and looked up into his strong, kind face, bent down so anxiously towards her, and to his dying day Tom Owen never forgot the intense longing in her eyes.

"Good-night, and God bless you," he said reverently.

Blanche Murray closed the door of her cabin softly behind her, then bent over the little girl's berth. The child was fast asleep, one hand under her rounded rosy cheek, the other lying palm upwards on the counterpane. A little smile touched her lips, and every feature told of perfect rest and content. The contrast between them seemed so great, and the woman's face gained an added sadness as she watched. Oh! if she might go back again and rectify that one great mistake of her life!

Turning away with a sharp sigh, she went up to the lamp and turned it down quite low. She wanted to think, and the light hurt her eyes.

He loved her.

And to-morrow he must know.

The blood rushed to her cheeks and she covered her burning face with her hands,

What would he think of her? Would he blame her—turn from her in disgust? Dear heaven, surely not that!

How could she go to him and say, "I am married, and I am running away from my husband?" She laughed harshly, and the laugh startled her.

He loved her.

Dick Campbell had said he loved her! He had sworn to make her rue the day when she married another man. He had followed her from place to place, rousing the all-too-ready anger of her husband, until at last her life grew unbearable. Was *that* love?

Her husband had said he loved her—once. She had trusted him, she was such a girl then, only seventeen, and her father was dead, there was no one to go to for advice. How long had her trust lasted? Had she not grown to dread his step, to start at the sound of his voice, to live in terror of what each fresh day might bring forth? And she had borne it all until—that night.

A scene rose before her.

It was a lovely night, soft and balmy, and the stars twinkled brightly in the clear eastern sky. From the far distance came the sound of the Burmese temple bells, now rising, now falling, on the still night air, as the wind swept gently through them.

She was sitting in the wide verandah that ran in front of the drawing-room, and her husband came in.

"So Campbell has been here this afternoon?" She could hear the angry, sneering tones as she had heard them then. A torrent of abuse followed. She never spoke to him—what was the use? He never listened except to grow ten times angrier.

"What are you doing this evening?" he had asked.

As he was dining at the club, she had promised to dine with Mrs. Ashton, she had answered. He turned round on her, said he supposed it was to meet Campbell, and had forbidden her to go.

"If you attempt to go I shall lock you up." Those were his very words.

"If you *think* such things, even, as locking your wife up," she had answered proudly, "I certainly think you are not fit to stay with. Why do you pretend to be jealous of Mr. Campbell? You

know you are not really so ; you grew tired of me after the first few weeks, and only make this a peg to hang your insults on."

His fury had passed all bounds then, for he knew she spoke the truth.

She shuddered. What was the use of going into it all?—of recalling how he had dragged her to a disused room, and, fastening a dog-chain to her wrist, securing it with a piece of cord at each end, had chained her to a heavy chest. Then telling her she should stay there until he chose to release her, had left her, coming back to add that if she cried out for help the servants would tell how they had found her, and the story would be all over the station in the morning. Of how she had struggled and struggled until the chain had cut a deep line all round the tender wrist, as she battled fruitlessly against the unyielding steel, trying vainly to undo the cord.

She shivered from head to foot. Would she ever forget that night? The terror of knowing she was in his hands, the fearful knowledge that she was—his wife—his—wife.

Help had come at last. Her old ayah, who had searched everywhere for her, telling the servants she knew evil had befallen the mem-sahib, for it was now past nine o'clock and she had never changed her dress for dinner, found her at last and, cutting the cord, had set her free—free !

And that night she had run away.

Just as she crossed the compound in a flood of moonlight she had seen a man's figure near the gateway, and, dashing in amongst the trees, she had run for dear life through the sheltering shadows. That figure, she knew now, had been Campbell's ; knew, too, that he must have gone to the house, learnt the story of that wretched night from her ayah (whose greatest gift was not discretion), and then followed her to Bombay.

That was all past—and now the future.

To be dogged by Dick Campbell, or—to go back to her husband. She raised her hand to her head as if to try and still its aching. And the only honest, tender, unselfish love that was hers, the love that might have turned earth for her into heaven—had it not come too late?—could bring nothing but misery, utter misery, in its train now. Oh ! the pain of it !—the pain of it !

She turned up the lamp, and getting out her writing-pad, wrote steadily for half-an-hour or so.

‘ It will be easier to write it than to tell it him,” she told herself. “ Perhaps I might never be able to tell him, who knows ? And he must know—to-morrow.”

Then throwing on a long cloak, after placing her letter on the tiny shelf above her wash-hand basin, she went quietly through the great folding doors leading into the passage and so out on to the lower deck.

The wind had risen and big heavy clouds were chasing each other across the sky. She leant over the side and looked down into the dark water. And—to-morrow he must know. *To-morrow* ! The word seemed to shriek through the air, and she turned with a start, half expecting to see some one who had spoken it. Then she turned back and watched the water dashing up against the side, splashing her from time to time with a shower of spray. How near that angry sea seemed. How easy it would be. Just to climb to the top of that rail, steady herself, and—then.

She thought of the life before her with a dread nothing could still. She pictured to herself how through all the weary years to come she would live with that fear upon her. And the love that had come to her now would but make life a thousand times more hard to bear. Was it right, was it just, that she, who was so young, should have had such a life of suffering ? Had she not struggled to be a good wife, to do her duty, though no love was there to help her to carry it through ?

It was too much, too much ! God had tried her too sorely, she could not bear it any longer. Life held nothing for her but wretchedness, beyond the common wretchedness that seemed to be the lot of all.

To-morrow he must know. How could she tell him ? How bear to see the pain on that dear face, and know that she had no power to drive it away ?

She could not bear it, she could not.

She put both her hands firmly on the rail and began to raise herself.

“ Blanche ! Blanche ! ” It was only a whisper, but she stood still and listened.

“ Father ! ” she cried, but only the wind whistling past answered her.

"I thought I heard him call me," she told herself dreamily. "Dear father."

What would he say to her? She let her arms drop to her sides as she asked herself the question with a start, raising her hand in a moment to steady herself, for the steamer was rolling heavily. What would he say? That she was wicked!—a coward to take her life because it was so hard to live it out!

Wicked, and a coward—yes.

She looked up into the cloudy sky and a passionate prayer for help went up from her heart. Death must come some day, until then God grant her strength to live her life.

Hours seemed to pass as she stood there gathering courage to face the future, battling with that fierce wish to take her fate in her hands and end her misery. But the struggle came to an end at last, the temptation was over, and she had conquered. Drawing her cloak more closely round her she turned away from the railing with a resolute step and began to make her way towards the folding doors, and——

It was all over in a moment. A huge wave breaking over the lower deck tossed her like a plaything against the saloon house, where her head struck sharply, and—Blanche Murray's life had been lived bravely to the end. Her voyage was over and she had reached home.

Next morning, when they found her, they noticed, all round her left wrist a deep, angry scar, which showed signs of having only recently healed, and some yards away, stiffened and spoilt by the sea water, lay the velvet band she had always worn as a bracelet, the little stud still fastened to one end. The piece of velvet had done its work, there was no need for concealment now, for she was beyond the reach of the world's stinging tongue.

A letter, addressed to Captain Owen, was found in her cabin and given to him. And as he read it the love in his heart grew stronger. He could love her still and break no law of God or man in the doing now.

To-morrow had come—and he knew.

T. W

A Walk Round Corunna (Coruña), North Spain.

CORUNNA has always struck me as a singularly interesting place, partly from its many historical associations. Its quaint upper part of the town (Ciudad), standing at a considerable elevation, so purely Spanish, with its narrow streets; old houses of substantial build, rich with armorial bearings; its fine old churches with clanging bells—all clustered together, keeping up a distinct separation in many points from the lower part of the town. I mean that there still exists a prejudice to move out of the ancient quarter, amongst the aristocratic inhabitants of the Ciudad, preferring the "old-time" associations—want of freshness, of brightness, and drainage—to removing outside the sacred precincts. Here in the Ciudad, even now, ladies keep the national dress—black, with mantillas, for early mass. These silent streets are occasionally roused by religious processions, periodical drives in private carriages, and the lumbering of cumbrous bullock carts. In years gone by—and *not* so far gone, either—a wall divided these sacred precincts from the lower town. Let us pause for a moment and look at the view from an opening in the upper town. What a noble bay Corunna has!—defended at its entrance by the forts, San Anton and Santa Cruz, both standing on small islands, the latter picturesque in the extreme. I have seen many bay entrances in my wandering life, but rarely one more beautiful than that of Corunna. Its rocky headlands on one side, its wooded shores on the other; these forts—farther up the bay another fort, San Diego. Then Corunna looks so well from the sea, flanked by its sea-wall, distance lending enchantment to the view. Let us walk up the headland that attracted us in passing, where stands General Sir John Moore's tomb. We enter a high-walled inclosure—a garden, in fact—laid out in beds of flowers, "Campo de San Carlos." In the wall facing the sea are glass windows let in, where one can enjoy the view free from wind. The tomb stands in the centre of the

garden ; it is of plain stone, bearing this inscription, lately put up by my husband, then Consul :

In Memory of
GENERAL SIR JOHN MOORE,
Who fell at Elviña, while covering the embarkation of the British troops,
16th January, 1809.

The whole is inclosed by iron railings, noting that this barrier was built, and the monument repaired, by order of the British Government, A.D. 1824 ; Richard Bartlett, consul. Inside the *tomb* railing a Spanish notice is inscribed :

AVISO.

El Sor. Presidente del Ayuntamiento de este Ciudad por Bando Publico, fecha 4 de Agosto del año 1824, mando que se exejiese la multa de veinte ducatos á cualquiera persona que violase la Urna Sepulchra del General Inglés, Don Juan Moore, lo que han saber á todos por el Presidente en la inteligencia, que el Consul de S. M. Britanica en esta Plaza, reclamara de la Autoridad Competente, la ireemisible exacion de dicha multa.

NOTICE.

The President of the Town Council of this city, by public notice dated 4th August, 1824, gives notice that they will exact a fine of 20 ducats to any person who shall injure the tomb of the English General, Sir John Moore, and the President gives notice that the British Consul in this city shall be allowed to exact from the competent authority of the city the strict enforcement of this fine.

While visiting the tomb to watch the placing of its new marble inscription, my husband penetrated inside the tomb inclosure ; he was interested in finding an almost obliterated :

In Memoriam.

Beneath are the remains of Anne, wife of Richard Bartlett, H.M. Consul for Corunna and its dependencies ; died September 17th, 1830. Aged 33 years.

This would be before we British owned a cemetery, and when bodies were buried outside the sea-wall. Within the iron-railed inclosure are placed four cannon, each with the following inscription :

Liberté, Egalité. Valence : Fructidor, l'an 2 de la République Française.
Bourg. Experton.

Now as we move to a far window, let us look beyond to the heights of Elviña, which rise behind the town, where the last

hard-fought action between the English and French took place, 16th January, 1809. How many times have we gone over the ground, thinking and realizing the event. One could imagine the brave general retreating *face* to the foe, he surrounded by brave men fighting to the last—outnumbered, artillery embarked, so near to the bay where lay the ships ready to take them off. Imagine the long, weary, calamitous march through a difficult country, in inclement weather, harassed by Soult on his rear, then attacked when on the very point of embarking. “God rest the ~~brave!~~” I always think it was like setting a plank adrift from a drowning man. “~~They resolutely set~~ their eyes *from* the ships,” wrote one who was present; then describes the mental anguish when it was known the general was down, so grievously wounded, that it was difficult to carry him to a safe place to die in. How tenderly those brave men would carry their general! Now let our eyes rest on the house where they laid him. He dies; and we will follow the funeral *cortège* to the ramparts where they buried him, and where his body still rests. How those requiem lines thrill us again while we think on those things.

Not a drum was heard, not a funeral note,
As his corpse to the ramparts we hurried;
Not a soldier discharged his farewell shot
O'er the grave where our hero we buried.

We buried him darkly at dead of night,
The sods with our bayonets turning,
By the struggling moonbeam's misty light
And the lantern dimly burning.

No useless coffin enclosed his breast,
Not in sheet nor in shroud we wound him;
But he lay like a warrior taking his rest,
With his martial cloak around him.

Few and short were the prayers we said,
And we spoke not a word of sorrow;
But we steadfastly gazed on the face that was dead,
And we bitterly thought of the morrow.

We thought, as we hollowed his narrow bed
And smoothed down his lonely pillow,
That the foe and the stranger would tread o'er his head,
And we far away on the billow.

Lightly they'll talk of the spirit that's gone,
 And o'er his cold ashes upbraid him—
 But little he'll reck if they let him sleep on
 In the grave where a Briton has laid him.

But half of our heavy task was done
 When the clock struck the hour for retiring ;
 And we heard the distant and random gun
 That the foe was sullenly firing.

Slowly and sadly we laid him down,
 From the field of his fame fresh and gory ;
 We carved not a line, and we raised not a stone,
 But we left him alone with his glory !

This "Campo de San Carlos" has now further interest for us, as it contains a tablet in memory of the loss of H.M.S. "Serpent." My husband felt this inclosure, the garden, a fitting place for such a memento. The tablet is placed on the right-hand wall as you enter, and bears this inscription :



Sacred to the Memory

Of 172 Officers and Men of the Royal Navy, who died at their post on board Her Britannic Majesty's Ship "Serpent," wrecked on Boy Rock, near Cape Villano, about 36 miles from this spot, 10th November, 1890.

This stone was placed by the Officers and Men of H.M.S. "Lapwing," in respectful remembrance.

"England expects every man to do his duty."

We will now leave the Campo de San Carlos and visit one of the churches out of the many—that of Santiago, said to have been founded about the middle of the twelfth century. The doors of this church attract attention by the richness of the carving, notably a figure of Santiago on the west door, carvings of foliage in the arch of the north doorway and herds of oxen supporting the lintel. We were shown here a fragment of a blue velvet cope, said to be English. The old verger wondered *why* we asked to see this. "It is so old," he said. "There are new ones far prettier." In this church, as in all the others, there is a sense of cold discomfort, a want of quiet, of reverence in the worship, and a faded gaudiness and tinsel in the decoration of the images, in strange contrast to the Romish churches at home. We will now

leave the old town behind us and come into the Promenade—the “Relieno,” so called because this wide, beautiful space was filled in from the sea. Part of this promenade is beautifully shaded by trees, has a “Rotunda,” where a band plays on Sundays and Thursdays, the hour varying with the time of year. Further on we reach the public gardens, small but tastefully laid out. The new town is growing, and contains some well-built houses, varying in architecture from the almost universal frontage of glass gallery, a style so ugly to an artistic eye. The “Calle Real,” the principal street for shops, runs between the old and new town. It is very narrow, and rather steep. There are no side walks, and, as the Calle is open to traffic of all kinds, one has to be on the *qui vive*. The market place is picturesque-looking. One certainly sees all types here, and I should advise the *unwary* to be wary. There is a walk of interest outside Corunna from the upper town, about a mile north-west, to the “Tower of Hercules,” a lighthouse, standing at an elevation of 363 feet above the sea-level, the light visible at the distance of twelve miles. The tower is said to have been built by the Phœnicians. I have frequently walked to this tower in a storm to watch the waves as they came rolling in crested with foam, booming against the rocks with terrific fury. There is to me a peculiar fascination in watching an angry sea. Life was so stagnant in the little Spanish town, gazing at the battling of the waves put a new rousing element in one, so to speak. *En route* to the tower we pass our cemetery, a small inclosure most carefully kept by my husband, who found it a sadly neglected spot and left it a flowering garden. Corunna is indented by bays—has, in fact, sea almost all round it. Riazor, a small bay at its back, is *the* bathing-place. The entrance from the town to this spot is very wretched. You pass through a poor fishing quarter, offensive to sight and smell. Within the last few years efforts have been made to improve the bathing arrangements, still, however, leaving much to be desired—so much, that visitors from the large cities, who flocked to Corunna during the summer, after the opening of the direct railway, came not again! Nature has done so much for Corunna; it would, in other hands, more than rival Biarritz! It is singular that all the outlets from Corunna are spoiled. The walk to the Tower of Hercules has a pig settlement—I can call it nothing else. There are rows and rows of pig huts, extending fully half a mile. Naturally and

rightly, stringent orders were passed a few years ago against the harbouring of pigs in the town ; but, we strangers wonder, *could* no other place have been found for them than this one, making it a painful effort to take the walk. Passing up the lower town on to the outlet from *its* side, there is a petroleum manufactory, just where the road twines in picturesque irregularity, carrying you to the "Lazarretto," a fine set of buildings, with grounds well laid out ; and beyond this to Sor. F.'s romantic pleasure gardens, a spot so exquisitely situated at the mouth of the Betanzos river, with stretches of land and glorious peeps of hills in the distance, where lies Cambré, a lovely little village—a "villagettura," in fact. But for a long distance on this road the olfactory nerves are irritated by that oppressive scent of petroleum refining. No, those who weary of the monotonous etiquette of a very small Spanish town—I use the word "small" in a wide sense—with its prescribed promenades, etc., have to face difficulties. One winding path round the cliffs to the tower we often frequented *once*, has now a refuse receptacle, a slaughter-house, also—imagination must finish my sentence. The longer I lived in Corunna the more I felt the inhabitants stood in their own light. The place is stagnant ; the little effort, at least *pro tem.*, a thing of the past. Why, we foreigners wonder, can they not rouse to improve the place as a tempting residence to others apart from themselves, and so bring in a newer life, with newer culture, vigour and enterprise. A place possessing so many natural advantages—a mild climate, taking it as a whole—God has done so much ; why can't man do more ? Corunna has its bull ring, and revels in this revolting entertainment. In a former paper I described a bull fight, my one experience. Crowds flock into the town for the bull fights. Those who cannot afford to go inside seemingly are fascinated to a nearness outside on the hills at the back of the building, or close to the doors. They clap or groan in unison with the insiders. At our house, situated some little distance from the bull ring, we could hear plainly all the varied sounds, and many of the expressions, so vociferous and loud does a Spanish crowd become over their national sport. Corunna has several antique wells in its vicinity. That of "Santa Margarita," where once stood a monastery, has water so clear, pure and cold, one is tempted to rest on an old stone bench and drink in passing. The country just round Corunna is very bare of trees, the result

of an indiscriminate cutting down, but within twelve miles by rail from the town we come to shady nooks and wooded dells, where wild flowers grow in profusion—spots where one could forget “for the nonce” that one lived always as a “stranger in a strange land.”

I cannot finish without recalling to mind certain historical associations. In Corunna landed John of Gaunt, July 26th, 1386, to claim the crown of Castille in right of his wife, daughter of Peter the Cruel. Philip II. embarked from Corunna to marry our Queen Mary. It was also from Corunna the so-called “Invincible Armada” sailed, from the two ports, Corunna and Ferrol (the latter place lies at the head of a bay not far distant), on July 26, 1588, to conquer and Romanize Great Britain. Have we not seen the loving (?) intentions towards us in the shape of torturing instruments saved from the wreckage, and now hanging in the Tower of London? Then Corunna was taken, April 20th, 1589, by Drake and Norris, with only 1,200 men. Later on we read how Sir David Baird landed, in October, 1809, with 6,000 men, to assist the Spaniards in driving out the French—and so on, down to the Battle of Corunna.

LOUISA M. RAWSON-WALKER.

A Fair Bindoo.

By JOHN H. WILLMER.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE ESCAPE OF THE PRISONER.

VINCENT found the major at home, but he had friends with him, and the doctor thought it best to await their departure before questioning Hoyles. Mr. and Mrs. Shallowford were over, and Hoyles was showing them about the house, pointing out this and that spot: here, where the murdered girl lay; there, where he had found Vincent; and the stains on the ground, round and about the room, he told them, were caused by blood. Vincent entered just when the major had conducted his friends to the small room in which was placed the cask of powder for the purpose of blowing up the house.

"Here is Mr. Vincent," said the major, as the doctor advanced towards them. "He'll be able to tell you more about that room and this than I have been able to."

"Is it true, Mr. Vincent, that you put the slow match out?" asked Mrs. Shallowford.

Vincent replied in the affirmative.

"Oh, how dreadful!" exclaimed the collector's wife.

She left Vincent in doubt as to what was "dreadful."

"Major Hoyles," continued the lady, "has been telling us of your gallant fight in the room. If I were in your place that night, do you know what I should have done?"

"Bolted, my love," said the collector.

"Indeed!" cried his indignant wife. "Have we, James, been married—let me see—twenty-one years and you know me no better? I run! Never! I should have hid in the dark and killed both of them—there; that's what I would have done."

"But it was dark everywhere."

"That will do, James. You *will* contradict me. But, Mr. Vincent, notwithstanding that my husband objects—or I should say, points out difficulties, I should certainly have acted as I have already mentioned."

"It is a great thing," said Vincent, "to keep one's presence of mind; and I must admit I did not keep mine."

"A great pity! I'm sure I should have kept my presence of mind and done as I have suggested. The very next time you are placed in a similar position, Mr. Vincent, remember what I have just told you."

Hoyles now took his friend into the sitting-room and there they conversed for about fifteen minutes on various topics, then Mr. and Mrs. Shallowford went home. The opportunity had now arrived for Vincent to question Hoyles. Before he could say anything, however, Hoyles, throwing himself down on a chair, exclaimed:

"They've gone! I'm simply pestered, Vincent. People will not respect my misery. You, however, I do not mind. Your sad face is good company for my spirits."

"Major," replied Vincent, "I don't know if you are aware of my engagement with your daughter Devaki."

"I know all about it, my dear fellow, and you shall have her."

"You will not be surprised," continued Vincent, "when I ask you a few questions about Devaki's birth."

"Why do you want to know all particulars? Do you not love her for herself?"

"I do. But there is some mystery about her birth which I want cleared up. Tell me truly, sir: is not Devaki's father Charles Edwards?"

Hoyles paused ere he replied, and he grew very pale.

"Vincent," said he, speaking very slowly, "your information is not correct. Charles Edwards is not the father of Devaki. How you came by that name I cannot imagine."

Vincent heaved a sigh.

"I wish," said he, "you had been able to tell me that Edwards was the father of Devaki."

"Why?" asked Hoyles with surprise.

Vincent looked hard at him.

"Major, can you not guess?" he asked.

"I am at a loss to know what you are driving at," was the reply.

"Please tell me how old Helen is."

"She will be twenty-three next September."

"And Devaki?"

"Not quite twenty yet."

"Can't you guess now?"

"I'm sure I don't know what you are driving at."

"Major Hoyles, ever since I've known you, which is now six or eight months, I have looked up to you as a man to be trusted."

"And now, sir—now?" cried Hoyles, turning pale with anger.

"I cannot say my opinion of you is the same."

Hoyles raised his hand to strike Vincent and then let it drop to his side.

"I cannot strike you," he cried, "unless you defend yourself. But, look here, I demand an explanation."

With annoying coolness, Vincent answered :

"You have but to rake up your doings of some years back and you will not want me to explain."

"For mercy's sake, man, don't torture me. What *do* you mean?"

"This!" hissed Vincent, now losing his temper: "That you basely lied to Devaki's mother when you made her believe you were an unmarried man. You had a wife living."

"How do you know that?"

"The tablet in the grave-yard."

Hoyles stared at Vincent as one in a dream; then he turned aside, muttering audibly, "I never thought of that. I never thought of that."

"Never thought of that!" exclaimed Vincent. "Do you mean that it never struck you that your shameful conduct would be detected by means of the tablet set up in memory of your wife? Or that the lie you told Devaki's mother was of any account?"

"Spare me!" cried Hoyles, writhing under the cutting words of the young doctor, whose handsome face looked still more handsome now as he stood facing Hoyles.

"Spare you! Did you spare——"

"Stay! Do not condemn me unheard, Vincent; you cannot understand my position. I am indeed guilty of a great sin, for which I am now justly suffering punishment; but—but I am not so great a sinner as you make me out. I promise, on the condition that you breathe not a word of it to any one else, to tell you this secret of mine."

"I'll do as you wish; but tell me the secret now."

Hoyles hesitated, shuffled about with the question, and then said:

"Vincent, not now. When we get back the girls—then. Believe me, as truly as there is a God above, I am not so bad as you think me."

"Major Hoyles, I cannot understand you. Everything you have said, from the inquiries I have made, points to this: that you lied to Devaki's mother. I shall, however, say nothing more on the subject till such time as we have recovered your daughters, and till then—farewell!"

When Vincent had gone, Hoyles paced up and down in his room in great agony of mind.

"I ought to have told him," he argued. "Why am I so great a coward? There is many another man would have done what I did and thought no wrong of it. But I—no, no, no, it is a great sin I have committed, almost akin to murder. But I ought to have told Vincent and he would not have gone away cursing me as he most assuredly has done. This—this is the punishment for my sin! Good God, have mercy! All my friends will be turning against me. Have not I spent the best portion of my life here in seeking to undo what I have done? and yet——"

He did not finish the sentence; he walked to an open window and looked out on to the broad stretch of plain before him.

"To-morrow," he said to himself, "I'll be far across there in search of the girls. I think we'll be more successful this time. We nearly lost ourselves in the woods that day, but now we'll have a good guide in the captive robber, who is going to lead us on condition that he has his liberty; and then——"

"Greengrass Sahib wishes to speak with sahib," said a servant, entering the room.

"Tell the sahib to come in."

Hoyles, when Greengrass entered, noticed that he was very pale.

"What is the matter with you?" he asked.

"Matter? Why, that fellow—that scoundrel—that lying robber has left without saying good morning to us, or even thanking us for feeding him for these many days."

"Do you mean to say the man is missing?"

"Yes. He's gone. Bolted in broad daylight, too, and yet nobody seems to have seen him go."

"When did this happen?"

"About an hour ago. He, the cunning fox, sent word to me

this morning that he was feeling ill—in fact, that he was dying, and he said that he wished to make a confession. I rushed over and found the man—as I then thought—unconscious. I had him placed in a *dooly* and conveyed to the hospital. I myself returned to my house to finish some work I was doing. I was not long home, when an hospital assistant came running over to my place, and he told me that the man had bolted. No guard, unfortunately, went with the *dooly*, and he escaped.”

“About half-an hour ago, you say, this happened?” asked Hoyles.

“Yes.”

“Then the man cannot have gone far.”

“My idea is, he has taken refuge in the bazaar, and I have sent about twenty men to search for him, while more are patrolling the roads, &c. I myself am going there now. Will you come?”

Hoyles snatched his hat off the table and rode away with Greengrass to the bazaar.

The whole of the day was spent in searching for the missing man, but the searchers were not rewarded with success. Tired and disheartened, for his hopes had revived when he was told that the robber was going to show them the way to Yakoob's den, Hoyles returned home.

Things were beginning to look very black now. Two whole weeks had been spent in useless search. Two weeks! Hoyles shuddered to think what, in that time, might be the fate of the two girls. There was something else now troubling the major. The depredations of Yakoob had become so frequent of late that it was thought by the military authorities that Hoyles was not doing his duty. In all his reports, Hoyles had pointed out that the robber was a man of great cunning, but the authorities replied they must have a man whose cunning would meet Yakoob's. Hoyles' last letter was one of pleading. He asked to be allowed to remain on till he had recovered his daughters, and till the answer to that was received, Hoyles had two troubles to attend to.

There was some talk, too, of Greengrass being recalled—but it was talk only, for the police authorities were aware that many and great were the difficulties Greengrass had to contend with. First and foremost, Yakoob had many friends in the bazaar and in some of the surrounding villages. True, they were not

willing friends ; they were compelled to shelter Yakoob and his men, and not to give notice of their movements : that is, their movements from village to village ; but where their stronghold was, not a man of them knew. The other great difficulty was the unexplored state of the forest. Not one knew—except the robbers—the depth of the forest. It was rumoured, too, that aboriginal tribes—portions of them—such as the Bhils and Ghonds, inhabited the woods. But no one could swear to this as a certainty. The natives firmly believed that the woods were the abode of *Booths* (devils), and beyond a certain point none would dare advance.

The police authorities, I say, were aware of these difficulties, and they considered Greengrass was fulfilling his duties to the best of his abilities ; therefore, they let him remain on, hoping, eventually, that the officer would run the outlaw in.

CHAPTER XXV.

A NOBLE SACRIFICE.

WHAT a change had come over Mariepoor. From being a gay station, it was now sober and even sad. There were no balls, no parties, no sports—in fact, no enjoyment whatever. Yet the people were not suffering from insomnia. They were wide awake, but full of sorrow at the loss of Miss Hoyles. Richard Greengrass, who had returned from Bombay, of all the Europeans, was the only one who did not sympathize with Hoyles in his great trouble. A smile of satisfaction always stole over his face whenever he saw Vincent, whom he looked upon as his rival. The latter's countenance, however, did not betray his feelings, and Richard was left in doubt as to the sincerity of the doctor's love. Little did he know that Vincent's nature was one that strove to conceal private afflictions. But there were times, when by himself, alone in his room, that Vincent gave vent to his pent-up grief, and then so tortured was he by his thoughts that he used to moan like a man in bodily pain. Then occasionally he felt a dulness of spirits that incapacitated him from doing any work.

One morning, when in this latter condition, when he found it impossible to shake off the lethargy begotten of despair, his servant Luxshimun, trembling in every limb—for his master, lately, had grown sour of temper—*salaamed* low and announced that two men wished to see sahib.

"Who are they?" inquired Vincent, making an effort to speak.

"I don't know," answered the servant.

"Are they ill? If so, tell them my stock of medicine is out, and tell them to be gone."

"They are not ill, sahib."

"Then what are they? Beggars? Set my dog on them. Here, Punch!"

"They are not beggars, sahib."

"Then what are they?"

"They want to speak with sahib."

"Look here, just you tell them to be off, or——"

The servant retreated. In a little while, however, he returned and coughed to make his master aware of his presence.

"Well?" asked Vincent.

"Sahib, the men say that——"

Vincent sprang from his seat.

"I'll *marò* the men, and you too, if you don't clear out of my presence," he roared.

Luxshimun beat a hasty retreat; but, in a few seconds, however, he returned again. Vincent, exasperated beyond measure, picked up his walking stick and was about to break it on his servant's back, when the latter shouted out quickly:

"They want to speak to you about Jaggoonath."

"Idiot!" exclaimed Vincent. "Why did you not say so at once? Show the men in."

The servant retired and then ushered in two men. One was a Mohammedan—a short but thickly-built man, with a bushy beard. The other was slim and handsome; he wore a thick moustache, side-lock and beard.

"What do you want?" asked the doctor.

"Do you know me?" asked the short Mohammedan.

"Not I," replied Vincent. "Was it to ask me this that you have come?"

The man, instead of answering, got rid of a mass of false hair off his face.

Vincent started back.

"John!" he exclaimed.

"You know me now, sahib?"

"Scoundrel! You dare come here?"

"Not so fast, sahib," as Vincent was reaching towards his

sword. "Stay where you are," and he covered the doctor with his pistol. "Listen to me, sahib: I have something to tell you."

"Ungrateful hound! What is it you want?"

"Revenge!"

"Ha! On whom?"

"Yakoob."

"Do you mean it? Or have you come to see what *loot* can be had here? Where is Devaki? where is Hoyles *Missy*?"

"With the Khan."

He paused awhile to see what effect this announcement would have on Vincent. He noted no particular change, however, in the doctor's face, and he continued:

"See, sahib," and Meer Ali took off his coat. His back was fearfully lacerated. "The Khan did this. Why? Because I asked for mine own. Before undertaking to betray Jaggoonath to him, I made him promise to give me as share in the booty the maid Devaki, whose charms had captivated my heart. Nay, start not, sahib. If you harm me now, a life very precious to you will be lost; I mean that of *Missy* Hoyles. Sahib," he continued, "Yakoob ordered me to be beat. He, Yakoob, had me beat! Oft have I saved him from being taken or killed. And he to do this to me. I'll have revenge!"

"What reward do you want?"

"His death! By Prophet Mahomet! I'll drink his blood before he has time to cry: *La ilaha illa Allah, Mahomet Rassoul Allah!*"

"I'll give you two hundred——"

"Keep your money, sahib. I'll help you to get the young lady if you will help me to have my revenge. Alone I cannot do it, for Yakoob has spies everywhere. But he'll not escape me. No, not even if he had *Al-Borak*, the white horse that flew with Mahomet on his back from Mecca to Jerusalem; from thence to heaven. By the bridge of *Al-Sirat*, over which I hope to cross the abyss of hell and reach heaven, I swear I'll yet be even with him."

Vincent heard him out, then said:

"You have told me of *Missy* Hoyles only: what of Devaki?"

"She, sahib, you must no more think of."

"Why?" asked Vincent, turning pale.

"Because she has promised to marry me."

"Liar!" shrieked Vincent.

"He is no liar, sahib; he has told you the truth."

"Devaki!"

"Yes, I am Devaki," said Ali's companion, throwing off her disguise.

"And you have promised——"

"To be his wife, sahib."

There was a quiver in her voice; yet her eyes, large and pleading, met unflinchingly Vincent's angry stare.

"Have you forgotten the promise you made me?" asked Vincent sadly.

The girl sighed and hung her head.

"Tell me, Devaki: was it to secure your release that you promised to marry this man?"

The girl turned hot all over, her bosom heaved, and she angrily replied:

"No, sahib."

The answer made, she bent her face to the ground and wept. Vincent waved Ali out of the room; then stepping forward, took Devaki's hands in his, but she sprang from him, crying:

"Touch me not! Touch me not! I—I—I—am, sahib, not worthy of your love. I——"

But she could not finish her sentence.

Vincent made her sit on a chair and begged of her to tell her story, and at length she did his bidding. She told how, outside Hoyles' house, she was seized, gagged, blindfolded and carried away to a great hill fort. There, on the third day, she was dragged before a priest, and although she answered not to his questions if it were her wish to become a Mohammedan, she was declared one; and on the following day, she, in the same fashion was married to Yakoob.

Vincent moaned aloud when he heard this.

"I was carried from the *mosque*," continued the girl, "in a deep swoon. I awoke from it, ill, and I prayed God to take me. That prayer, no doubt, was a wicked one, for I recovered rapidly. When I was able to sit up in my bed, the Khan visited me often. I tried to injure my health again by refusing to sleep, for I knew that when I was perfectly well again, the Khan would have me taken to his palace to live there as his wife. I prayed more earnestly to die, and although I recovered rapidly, God in His mercy in a way answered my prayer."

"How?"

"I'll tell you. Before I was perfectly well, certain news reached the Khan which made him set out immediately for Mariepoor. He returned, sahib, with Helen and Jaggoonath's wealth. But he was seriously injured, and he told me that you it was that had wounded him. He also informed me of my father's murder and that you were dying. Next day he was very ill, and day by day he grew worse and worse, till I hoped for Helen's sake, as well as mine own, that he would die. But, sahib, after many days, he took a change for the better, and he is nearly well now. A week ago I planned with Meer Ali, whom I met in secret, to escape to you and lead you to rescue Helen. Sahib, if haste is not made, my sister will be what I am—a Mohammedan and Yakoob's wife."

"Peace, Devaki! That marriage is a sham; you are mine and——"

"Enough, sahib."

"Don't interrupt me. I don't care what you say, marry you I will."

"Impossible, sahib."

"Impossible? Devaki, do I not know that against your wish you married this man?"

"Hear me out, sahib. Meer Ali, on one condition, promised to bring me to you."

"And that condition?"

"I was to become his wife."

"And you consented?"

"I did. Sahib, be not angry with me—I—I could not help it. I love you, sahib, and no one else; and I would not have consented to Ali's proposal—no, not to escape Yakoob—but that Helen, who is dear to me as if she were my sister, is in danger of suffering what I have suffered. Then I argued that I could never now become your wife, even though the marriage with Yakoob were illegal, and I said: 'My sister loves Vincent. Oh, what pain it will be to her to be forced into marriage with Yakoob, while all her love is centred in the sahib. Cannot I do something for her? Yes; I'll marry this Ali, and save my sister.'"

"Noble girl!" exclaimed Vincent. "Notwithstanding what you say to the contrary, I shall marry you and no other."

"Then, sahib, must I go back."

"Why?"

"I have promised Ali to be his wife on condition that he leads you to recover Helen."

"But he is a liar and a villain, Devaki."

"I know it, yet will not my conscience allow me to break faith with him."

"He broke faith with us."

"True."

"It was he that was instrumental in carrying you away. He is answerable for your father's death."

"I know it."

"Then why plead a scruple of conscience?"

"Sahib, sahib, tempt me not. It is not yourself, sahib, that is making these suggestions, but Satan."

"Devaki, listen to me: Do you love me?"

"Sahib knows."

"Yes, yes, I do know, and also that your sense of duty is weightier than your love for me."

"Sahib, there is now a sting in your speech. How often have you not told me of your God, of His justice, of His hate of lies and deceit?"

"But you don't believe in my God."

"I do."

"Then why marry this fellow?"

"Because I love you."

"What!" cried Vincent in astonishment.

"Sahib," said the girl, "disguise it not from me that, although you love me, you love my sister better. Helen is now with the Khan. She loves you dearly, but will soon be forced to wed the Khan. My heart bled for you both, and I went to Ali, whom I had heard was punished because he loved me, and told him that if he showed me the way here, I would marry him. She is guarded, sahib, or we had brought her with us."

For several seconds Vincent could not speak. The noble spirit of the girl brought tears to his eyes. Seeing that it was useless trying to persuade Devaki not to throw away herself on Ali, he said:

"Devaki, I have not yet met one of so noble a spirit as yours. And I feel certain God will not allow you to marry that scoundrel

Ali. But we will not further discuss that subject. What are your plans for Helen's release ? ”

“ You must call Ali. He will tell you.”

Vincent decided not to question him in his house. He ordered his dog-cart and drove down with Ali and Devaki to the major's. To their disappointment Hoyles was not at home.

“ When will he return ? ” asked Vincent of the servant.

“ Do not know, sahib,” was the unsatisfactory reply. Vincent, however, was of the opinion that the major would not be away any time, so he decided to wait his return. Just five minutes afterwards, a carriage drove up to the door, and Major Hoyles and Lieutenant Shilstone entered the house.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MAJOR HOYLES SEES DEVAKI FOR THE FIRST TIME.

“ WHAT—Who?—Hullo, Vincent! Where did you manage to capture this villain? What! not handcuffed him yet? Ho, there! ”

“ One minute,” said Vincent, interrupting Hoyles. “ This man is not my prisoner.”

“ So I see. But do you imagine I'm going to let him slip? I'm hanged if I do! ”

“ Hear what he has to say first.”

“ Not a word. I know what sort of a tongue he has. His arguments may appear plausible to you, but to me they are specious.”

“ But you have not heard him.”

“ I know exactly what he'll say—and with what cunning, too.”

“ Please hear him, Hoyles.”

“ Vincent, man, don't stand there pleading with me. I have been too often fooled already and—Hullo! I did not see this lady. Great heavens! How like Helen she is. Are you Devaki ? ”

“ Yes, sahib.”

“ How came you here ? ”

“ This man, Meer Ali, brought me.”

“ From where ? ”

“ From Yakoob's fort.”

“ Who took you there ? ”

"Yakoob. It was on the night of Macbay Sahib's wedding. When I went out to see who was peeping in at the window I was seized, gagged, blindfolded and carried away."

"How did you manage to escape?"

The girl hesitated to tell.

"Major," said Vincent, "you must not ask her that question now; afterwards she or I will tell you."

"Has she told you?"

"Yes."

"Will you tell me, Devaki, how it was Helen could not escape with you?"

"She is guarded."

"And you were not?"

"At first I was."

"Why not afterwards?"

"I can't tell you now."

"And this man helped you to escape?"

"Yes."

"You see, Hoyles," said Vincent, "that I have not trusted this man without some good reason. Before I listened to him, I had a quiet talk with Devaki, and she bid me trust him. I will not hide from you the fact that John wishes to help us to meet his own ends. Let him tell you his story."

Hoyles consented. Ali told the same story he had given Vincent, and when he had concluded, Hoyles, in a calm voice, though his face betrayed how greatly he was excited, said:

"When must we start?"

"This evening," answered Ali. "To delay is fatal."

"How long will it take us to reach Yakoob's fort?"

"Five days."

"What! Then it is useless."

"To-morrow, sahib, the ceremony will begin; and on the third day from then your daughter, after embracing the faith of Islam——"

"Peace, hound. What is the good of us then going?"

"To have revenge, sahib."

"Revenge? True, true. But, O God, I would rather rescue my daughter."

"Sahib, there is another way by which we can cut the journey down by two days. But the road is difficult. And we must

travel with our swords drawn, for there are wild Bhils and Ghonds that will dispute our way."

"Do you say we'll be able to reach the fort in time to save Helen if we adopt this latter route?"

"Yes, sahib."

"Never mind the danger, then; I'll take a sufficient force with me. How many men has Yakoob?"

"About four hundred."

"Then I'll take two hundred with me."

"Be advised by me, sahib, and take an equal number or more. The fort is very strong and the Khan's men know how to fight."

"What say you, Shilstone? Don't you think two hundred men enough?"

"Quite enough to capture the place, sir, but insufficient; I should say, to capture all or the major portion of the robbers."

"I agree with you. By-the-bye, whom am I to leave behind: you or Macbay?"

Shilstone hesitated to reply. He was anxious to go, but did not like to be selfish. Vincent, however, came to his assistance.

"I'm afraid Macbay will not be able to go because his wife has had a relapse."

"Indeed! I heard she was doing well."

"So she was till late last night."

"You don't mean to tell me you have no hopes of her recovery?"

"Dear me, no. There is no danger whatever. If there were, I should not be here now. Come, Devaki, I'll take you over and leave you with Miss Shallowford."

"May I not go over and see my old home?" asked the girl, tears gathering in her eyes.

"Not alone, Devaki," replied Hoyles. "Who told you about—about——"

"My father's death?"

"Yes."

"Yakoob, and he boasted of having done the deed."

It was on the tip of Vincent's tongue to tell Devaki that Jaggoonath was not her father, but he thought it wise not to. He was somewhat surprised, however, that Hoyles did not object to the arrangements about Devaki staying with the Shallowfords. But he was not sorry. He did not like the idea of Devaki

calling Hoyles "father," and living with him, till such time as the mystery was cleared up.

Miss Shallowford was surprised and glad to see Devaki. The resemblance between Devaki and Helen did not escape Miss Shallowford, and she spoke to Vincent about it. He did not answer her, but lifted his hat and drove away to his home, to get ready lint, splints, operating instruments, &c., to take with him.

About four o'clock that evening, the small band of men who were to punish the robbers marched out of Mariepoor. Nobody knew where they were going to. Hoyles judiciously kept the object a secret till they were well into the woods, and then he told the men. A shout of pleasure broke from the throats of the men—Europeans and Indians alike—for they were burning to avenge the abduction of Helen—"The Queen of Mariepoor," the soldiers called her—and Devaki, also the murder of Jaggoonath. Hoyles' object in saying nothing to the men till they had left Mariepoor far behind them was to keep the news from spreading by chance to the bazaar, where Yakoob had spies. Now he was in hopes of capturing the robber fort by surprise.

Many miles were covered that day, or rather, the greater part of that day, for towards evening they had arrived where the jungle was very thick, and the journey onwards had to become slow. At times, however, there was a break in the woods, and the men marched forward with quick step. Now darkness set in, and Ali thought it advisable to halt, as they were not far now from the dwellings of the wild men, whom it would be best to encounter by day.

The order was given, arms were piled, and the soldiers were soon busy preparing their dinner. Major Hoyles and Vincent and Shilstone were having a quiet smoke, when the challenge of a sentry startled them.

"Who goes there!"

A second later the sharp report of a rifle was heard, followed by a loud cry. The three officers sprang to their feet and rushed away in the direction from whence the report had come.

"What is it?" asked Hoyles of the sentry.

"I heard footsteps approaching, sir, and I challenged. Receiving no answer, I fired, and I imagine with good effect, too."

Vincent had advanced cautiously into the bush. He presently heard the leaves disturbed and he cried: "Halt, or I fire!"

"Sahib ! Sahib ! It is I," and Devaki sprang from behind a bush, and fell fainting in the doctor's arms.

Hearing Vincent's challenge and the cry of "Sahib !" Shilstone and Hoyles, the former leading the way, rushed towards the doctor

"Hullo ! What have you there ?" cried Shilstone.

"Devaki," was the laconic reply.

"Devaki !" cried Hoyles. "Heavens ! Is she hurt ?"

"I'm afraid she is," replied Vincent. "She is in a faint."

Without another word Vincent pushed forward towards his tent, followed by Hoyles. Shilstone was on duty, and he went round from post to post seeing that the sentries were awake.

Vincent, as soon as he reached his tent, placed Devaki on a camp bed and proceeded to look for wounds. But he found none. Presently, Devaki opened her eyes, and recognizing Vincent, she wound her arms about his neck and drew his face down to meet hers.

"Are you wounded ?" inquired Hoyles anxiously.

"No, sahib," replied Devaki, as she blushed red, for she did not know there were others in the room besides herself and Vincent.

In a little while Devaki had recovered sufficiently to tell Vincent and Hoyles how she had escaped from the Shallowfords and had followed after them. She said that Mr. and Miss Shallowford were out, and she got away from the house, after writing a note for Miss Shallowford, and escaped to the woods without being seen. Then she followed the foot-marks in the sand till she came to where the soldiers were encamped. "I was creeping," continued Devaki, "under a bush, from whence I could see the camp in order to make sure who the soldiers were, when the sharp challenge of a soldier startled me ; and, before I could speak, he had fired. I heard the bullet sing uncomfortably near my head, and I gave a cry and sank at the foot of a large tree."

Vincent got some supper ready for Devaki ; then, after she had eaten, and conversed for a short while with Hoyles and Vincent, he ordered her to bed, giving up his tent to her.

"And where will sahib sleep ?" asked Devaki.

"I'll find him a bed—on the floor," said Hoyles laughing. "Come along, Vincent."

The doctor imprinted a kiss on the girl's forehead, then followed Hoyles to his tent.

"Major," said Vincent, stretching himself out by the tent door and lighting his pipe, "what do you propose doing with Devaki?"

"Take her with us, of course. We can't send her back."

"I don't mean that. What I desire to know is, what you intend doing about her marriage with Ali."

"What!"

"Oh, I forgot. You know nothing about it. Devaki has promised——" and Vincent explained matters to Hoyles.

The major walked out of the tent, and for fully five minutes strode up and down without exchanging a single word with the doctor. Then suddenly he drew up in his walk, slapped his leg and burst out laughing.

"What ever is the matter?" demanded Vincent.

"Why, man alive! Ali has to get *my* consent. Ha! Ha! Ha!"

"Of course he has," exclaimed Vincent, springing to his feet. "Of course he has!"

And he too burst out laughing.

"I shall tell Devaki all about it in the morning," said Hoyles.

"You'll do nothing of the sort," said Vincent.

"Why?" asked Hoyles.

"Because Devaki's ideas about honour are lofty, and she'll rather go back to captivity than break faith with Ali."

"Then must I not even tell her who I am?"

"I really think it best not to now. You see, if you were to tell her you were her father, she would naturally tell you of her promise to Ali, and would expect to hear something from you."

"I agree with you, Vincent. Well, good-night now. We must be up early to-morrow."

"Good-night," answered Vincent, as he rolled over on to his side. In half-an-hour more both were fast asleep.

(To be continued.)

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Elfreda.

By MRS. LODGE,

Author of "GEORGE ELVASTON," etc.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ONE morning, not long after Alex Cameron's departure, Mrs. Trimble heard the housekeeper's bell ring, and at once hastened down stairs to answer it. This bell had been so seldom rung of late that the good woman felt rather curious to know who wanted her.

Much to her surprise, she found a tall, elegantly-dressed lady standing on the doorstep.

There was an undefined something in the air and carriage of this refined-looking woman that commanded Mrs. Trimble's respect at the first glance.

"This is Mr. Cameron's office, is it not? Will you tell his clerk a lady wishes to speak with him?" said the lady in a tone that convinced the housekeeper she was in the presence of some great personage; and all at once remembering her country breeding, she dropped a courtesy as she informed her that the clerk, Mr. Merryman, was not in the office; he had just gone out to his dinner.

"Oh, he won't be long, I suppose," said the lady. "Please show me to Mr. Cameron's chambers, and whilst I await his return, will you be good enough to tell the housekeeper I should like to speak with her."

"I am Mrs. Trimble, the housekeeper, at your service," she replied, dropping another courtesy.

"Well, Mrs. Trimble, I am glad to make your acquaintance," said the lady graciously. "I have heard a great deal about you from Mr. Cameron, and I promised him I would come and see you."

"Thank you, my lady, you are very kind," replied Mrs. Trimble, quite flustered by so much condescending attention. "If you'll be good enough to follow me, my lady, I'll see if the old clerk has locked the office door; he does most times, and then nobody can get in."

On the first landing Mrs. Trimble paused, and diving down into her capacious pocket brought forth a latchkey, and after some little delay opened a door on her right.

"Oh, I'm glad the old clerk hasn't locked the door, for a wonder," she cried. "Will you please to walk this way, my lady."

It was possible to discern objects in the outer chamber, when one's eyes got accustomed to the dim light filtered through the dirt-begrimed narrow window; but when Mrs. Trimble threw open the door of the inner room it was found in total darkness.

"Dear me, I declare the shutters haven't been opened to-day!" exclaimed the housekeeper fussily; "one never can depend on that old clerk. An' would you believe it! he locks the doors every night and takes the keys away with him; in fact, it's a wonder he's left the place unlocked now. He never lets me clean up his office until I comes in with a broom an' pail, an' turns him out with the dust I raises about his ears."

When Mrs. Trimble had opened the shutters and let a flood of light into the room, she turned and saw the lady holding a tiny gold flask in one hand and a pocket-handkerchief in the other, whilst a sweet pungent odour perfumed the air.

"Find the place rather close, don't you, my lady? Always has smelt close and musty since the corpse lay here."

The lady sank into the nearest chair and motioned her to open the window.

"Well, I dare say the smell of this shut-up room is quite overpowering to one coming in from the open air," said the loquacious housekeeper; "but, you see, I'm used to close, shut-up rooms, so I don't mind it. Hope you feel better now, my lady."

"The close air of the room did strike me rather unpleasantly at first," replied the visitor in a faint voice, as she looked around her with a sort of shrinking aversion. "But surely this cannot be Mr. Cameron's private office?"

"Oh, yes, it is, my lady, an' a most comfortable room it was, too, before that dreadful affair took place in it; but somehow I cannot help thinking that the place has got an uncanny, lone-

some look about it ever since——Do you see that dark stain on the floor, my lady? That's blood! All the water in the river yonder wouldn't wash it out; I've tried an' tried myself, but it's no use—the more one scrubs the floor the darker the stain becomes!"

The lady turned her eyes towards the spot indicated by Mrs. Trimble's outstretched finger, turned pale, and gave a low shivering sigh.

"How came that blood stain on the floor?" she asked, almost in a whisper.

"Did you never hear that a young nobleman shot himself in Mr. Cameron's chambers, my lady? —or leastways he was shot here; but some thinks as how it wasn't suicide at all."

"What—what can you mean?" gasped the stranger, with dilated eyes and white lips.

"Well, of course 'tis not for me to say, but there's them that has their suspicions, an' say that the murder will out some day."

"Murder!"

"Why, dear, dear, how white an' ill you look! I oughtn't to have let out what I've done—the doctors an' the jury found 'twas suicide; so them as has their suspicions must be mistaken."

"Is there any one suspected of—of the deed?"

"It's not for me to say—'tis the police as suspects——"

"But whom do they suspect?" asked the lady, her face growing pinched and drawn, almost aged.

"How can I tell? I don't know anything about it," replied Mrs. Trimble, drawing in; she was afraid she had gone too far.

"Ah, well, what avails it now? Nothing can bring the dead to life—and—and alas, the bare idea that he was murdered is too horrible."

"Well, so it is, but——" here the housekeeper stopped suddenly short, the stranger's eager gaze almost transfixed her; she began to think this might be some relation of the dead man, and she would be held accountable for what at most was only idle gossip. So she adroitly changed the subject by asking the lady what she had come to speak to her about.

"Ah, true; I had almost forgotten," replied the lady, recovering herself by an effort. "Mr. Cameron is an old friend of mine, and I promised, before he went away, that I would come and see the little girl you call Freda, and I will thank you to let me have a

few words with her at once. From what Mr. Cameron told me, I've taken a great interest in the child."

"I'd be glad if I could let you see her, but alas, alas! I've not the slightest idea where she is at this present moment."

"Not know where she is?" cried the lady, fixing her dark eyes searchingly on Mrs. Trimble.

"No, indeed, my lady," replied the housekeeper, wiping her eyes with her apron, "though I've searched half London through to find her—an' so has Mr. Merryman, too, for the matter of that."

"Have you lost the child?" cried the lady, sinking into a chair and resting her elbow on the table, with her back turned towards the bloodstain on the floor.

Mrs. Trimble sat down in a chair opposite. She was glad to have some one to talk with; indeed, she never could resist telling her troubles to any one who was ready to listen to them.

"Well, I can't say as how Freda is lost," said she, as she twisted and untwisted the corner of her apron, as though rather at a loss how to begin. "I suppose Mr. Cameron told you the poor darling wasn't my child?"

The lady nodded assent.

"Well, her own mother took her away one evening, when I was out, an' I have not set eyes on her since."

"But surely you must know where the mother lives," said the lady somewhat impatiently, "so please be good enough to tell me where I am likely to find her. Remember I have given my word to Mr. Cameron to look after this child during his absence."

"I really haven't the least idea where the child is, my lady—her mother took her away before Mr. Cameron left. He was in some way about it, because he'd something left in his charge for Freda and her mother. Mr. Merryman has possession of it now, whatever it is, an' Miss Mathers has only to call here an' get it: the old clerk told me so himself."

"But what has this Miss—Miss something or other to do with the matter?" asked the lady superciliously.

"Ah, to be sure!" cried Mrs. Trimble as though recollecting herself. "Here have I been talking to your ladyship as though you knew all about this affair from beginning to end: Miss Mathers is Freda's mother; but didn't Mr. Cameron tell you that when he asked you to look after the child?"

"He told me her mother was a widow," replied the lady severely.

"Well, for the matter of that, Freda's mother says so too. That young nobleman, who shot himself in this very room, did go through a ceremony of marriage with Alice Mathers, that's certain; else he wouldn't have put an end to himself soon as ever he found out that she an' her child were still in existence."

"Ah, did he see the child?" asked the lady, in a voice that trembled spite of herself. "You will oblige me very much if you will tell me all you know about this sad affair from the beginning."

Mrs. Trimble needed no further pressing; she settled herself in her chair and began quite literally at the beginning, from the time when she was servant to Mrs. Mathers until the hour when Alice left the shelter of her roof with Freda in her arms.

Yet, prolix as her tale was, the lady listened with breathless interest; never once interrupting her, except to ask some leading question, when Mrs. Trimble appeared inclined to bring in a little too much of her own family history.

When at length Mrs. Trimble paused, rather for want of breath than lack of words, the lady asked if she were certain that the person she called Mathers had been alone in the room with the young nobleman on the night of his death.

"Certain?" echoed Mrs. Trimble. "Why, of course I am. They went downstairs together, an' I heard them enter this very room; no one saw him afterwards, until Mr. Cameron came in an' found the poor young lord lying dead on the floor, shot through the heart. Alice suffered a great wrong at his hands, and his sin found him out at last!"

The lady steeped her handkerchief in the contents of the small flask and bathed her brow with the perfume once more.

In her admiration of the slender white hand and sparkling rings that adorned the taper fingers, Mrs. Trimble failed to notice how that hand trembled, and how deadly pale were the lady's lips and brow.

"This is a very sad story you have been telling me," said the lady in a calm even tone of voice. "I have not the least doubt but that the woman, with her child, will turn up shortly: you said, did not you, that Mr. Merryman, the clerk, had something left in his care for them? Have you any idea what it is?"

"Well, money, I should think," answered Mrs. Trimble readily,

and casting her eyes around the room with a sort of inquiring look ; " a large sum, too, one would imagine, else why does the old man lock up the chambers so carefully, an' not allow a creature to enter the place when he's absent ? "

Quite unobserved by the housekeeper, the lady's eyes followed hers around the room, and rested for an instant on one particular spot.

" The clerk would not be likely to keep a large sum of money here, when he could lodge it in a bank for safety," remarked the lady carelessly. " But I thought you said he was only gone to his dinner and would be back shortly : I have an engagement for three o'clock, so I cannot possibly wait any longer ; I will call on some future day and see him about Freda. Having promised Mr. Cameron to look after this child, I am rather anxious she should be found and cared for."

" So am I, too, my lady, an' so is Mr. Merryman ; he walks miles an' miles after office hours, hoping he may come across Freda somewhere—he's told me, in confidence, that she nor her mother won't want for nothing again, once he finds them, an'—but please remember this is a secret," said Mrs. Trimble mysteriously, and speaking almost in a whisper—" I'm told that Freda is a great heiress, an' there's documents left with Mr. Merryman to prove it."

" Ah ! " ejaculated the lady with a start, rising to her feet. " I must really be going. May I ask you for a glass of water before I go ? I am rather thirsty."

" I'll fetch you some in a moment," answered the housekeeper, preparing to leave the room.

" Thanks, so much," said the lady graciously. " But please don't be long ; I am rather in a hurry to be gone."

The instant the door closed behind Mrs. Trimble, the lady darted forward and took down a small bunch of keys that hung on a nail, half hidden by an old shooting jacket ; she had spied them out when her eyes followed Mrs. Trimble's around the room, and had just asked for the water, rightly concluding that the housekeeper would leave the room to fetch it.

She, however, was really thirsty, and at once emptied the glassful Mrs. Trimble brought her, with feverish haste, her hand trembling so much as she carried it to her lips that some of the water was spilt on her dress.

Promising to call again, as she wanted to see Mr. Cameron's clerk, and was anxious also about Freda, she at once left the place.

But it was not until after Mrs. Trimble had watched her out of sight from the door-step that she remembered how remiss she had been in not asking the lady her name.

"How stupid of me!" she cried, quite vexed with herself. "I dare not tell Mr. Merryman I've let a stranger go in and sit down in Mr. Cameron's private room without so much as asking her name; why, he'd be quite angry at my letting her in at all, seeing he was out."

CHAPTER XXX.

HORACE MERRYMAN always wore a melancholy, depressed air, but he had now become far more woe-begone-looking than a mute at a third-rate funeral.

He no longer indulged in his favourite walks through Highgate Woods, nor might he be seen wending his way, as aforetime, through the pleasant roads that led to Harrow or Barnet; he now confined his walks to the city streets, turning down blind alleys and exploring dingy out-of-the-way courts, where needlewomen and the workers in the great commercial hive most do congregate. Quiet, forsaken-looking nooks these city courts for the most part are, where children are never seen at play, and nothing but weary plodding footsteps are heard from early morn to darkening eve.

He had a way of stopping and peering after any tall gaunt woman that passed him by, and sometimes he followed them to ask their names, in a trembling eager way, that suggested inebriety or a growing tendency towards Colney Hatch.

If in walking along the street he happened to descry a fair child in the distance, he quickened his pace almost to a run, and when at length he overtook her, he would look wistfully into her face, exclaiming, with tears in his eyes: "Ah! it's not Freda after all—what a pity! Do you know any little girl by the name of Freda, my dear?"

Sometimes he went into corner shops in cheap neighbourhoods and made a small purchase, just to enable him to make inquiries after the objects of his search; but he made his inquiries in such a confused, rambling manner that the shopkeepers,

for the most part, failed to comprehend him ; yet they spoke him civilly because he looked so careworn and sad. At times a kindly-hearted tradesman would take an interest in his tale, and remember that he had seen a tall dark woman with a fair little girl passing his shop. In all probability she would be found lodging in the next street—there was a widow who did lace cleaning living at number ten, third floor back ; she had left her card at his shop, but it got lost somehow. He remembered it was No. 10, Pinching Street ; she was middling tall and as thin as a lamp-post.

But in vain Mr. Merryman's inquiry ; the lace cleaner at number ten proved to be an old lady with a false front, who was very thin certainly, and there ended all the resemblance she bore to the woman he sought ; this was one of the many false scents he followed up, until he grew weary and began to lose all hope of finding Alice and her child.

He often held long consultations with Mrs. Trimble on this one absorbing object of his life.

He made her relate over and over again every particular she knew about Alice and Freda, often reverting to the ceremony of marriage that Alice alleged had been gone through between her and the late Lord Chineron.

They also compared notes daily with each other, concerning their united endeavours to trace both mother and child.

Mrs. Trimble's son, "Gavy," as she called him, to distinguish him from David his father, had also taken up the search warmly, and he being a youth of imaginative temperament, suggested to Mr. Merryman the desirableness of at once possessing themselves of a barrel organ and a monkey.

"You see, sir," said he, with the wisdom acquired in London streets, "that all the children flock to the doors and windows when they hear the organ-grinder a-coming ; well, you grinds and exhibits Jacko with his tricks, and we are safe to see Freda afore long, up at one of the windows a-looking out. I'd be earning something, too ; them organ chaps picks up a lot of pence, and whilst you was a-grinding, I'd have my eye on the windows and look after the coppers."

Mr. Merryman was quite struck with Gavy's acuteness, but he did not quite like the idea of turning street musician until every other effort failed him. He told Gavy, however, that he was

quite willing to purchase or borrow, both barrel-organ and monkey if he, Gavy, liked to follow that line on his own account.

Gavy shook his head at this proposal. "It wouldn't do for a young 'un to take up that line without an old gent. to keep him in countenance, 'cause why, the hurdy-gurdy foreign chaps would be down on him in less than no time." He said this ruefully, because he rather liked the idea of exhibiting a monkey and gathering up the pence.

Mrs. Limber, Merryman's genteel landlady, began to think her lodger had taken to evil ways; what else could keep him till near midnight, week in and week out, wet or dry?

He had lost his appetite, too, looked wretched when he came down to breakfast, and never by any chance asked for supper.

He had ceased to partake of her genteel Sunday repast, also, and altogether, except that he paid his weekly bill with his usual regularity, had become a most unsocial and unsatisfactory inmate of her genteel home.

He never once mentioned the cause of his altered demeanour to that genteel personage, doubtless considering her too accomplished and genteel to care for such poor outcasts as Freda and her mother.

I am not quite sure that he would not have embraced the monkey and barrel-organ proposition, only for the dread he entertained of meeting some member of the genteel Limber household during his peregrinations.

Had the mother of Freda been an acknowledged wife and the widow of an honest man, however poor, Merryman would have held his head high and inquired after her with more openness and confidence. It was the cloud under which Alice pined that made the old man, with his innate refinement of character, shrink from mentioning her name to any one he knew, except Mrs. Trimble and her son.

He could not but share that good woman's opinion concerning the marriage ceremony Alice had gone through with the unfortunate earl, because he knew that Lord Chineron had left a widow and a son, as the newspapers put it, to mourn his loss.

Alice had been deceived and betrayed; a woman far more to be pitied than blamed, yet a woman, nevertheless, that genteel females like Mrs. Limber wouldn't care to associate with.

The pocket-book was sealed securely, or perhaps Merryman

might have been tempted to pry into its contents, although he did not expect to find anything in it more than a pecuniary provision for Freda and possibly for her mother also.

Anyhow, it would be his care to see that neither wanted for anything, once he was fortunate enough to find them, so he often told himself, and worked very hard at engrossing, that he might lay by a little fund for this particular purpose.

As a rule he worked from nine till four, allowing himself an hour for dinner, but it sometimes happened that he followed up some imaginary trail during his dinner hour, and did not return until late in the afternoon.

It was his custom to put a written notice on his office door, when he went to his dinner, informing any one it might concern to know that he was gone out and would return shortly.

One day, a woman closely veiled crept noiselessly up the dark stair and read this notice on the door. It was not her intention, however, either to depart or await his return outside on the landing, as she at once inserted a key in the lock and opened the door without the least hesitation.

In another instant she was standing alone in the dingy outer office belonging to Alex Cameron's set of chambers. She was trembling visibly, and her breath came thick and fast as she cast an uneasy, frightened look around her.

Then she proceeded straight towards the door that led to the inner room, unlocked it with nervous haste, then took out the key, locked the door on the inside, and throwing something over the keyhole to keep out prying eyes, gave a deep sigh of relief, although the place was in semi-darkness and smelt like a vault.

The shutters were closed but not fastened. She opened them a little way and peeped out cautiously, to see if there was any chance of opening the windows without being observed from the outside.

She might venture to open one of the windows a few inches. The air was suffocating. She began to feel faint.

Like a midnight robber, she noiselessly unbarred the window and lifted the sash.

No one was about, the place outside appeared quite deserted ; seeing this she gained courage and threw the window wide open.

The fresh air revived her ; the thought, too, that she had not a moment to lose urged her on to immediate action.

First, however, she shut down the window to within a few inches and closed the shutters in such a way that light enough fell through to enable her to see what she was about, although a person from the outside would fail to observe that shutters and window were not closed as usual.

Then she looked about her with an eager, inquiring gaze.

Where should she begin her search? An iron safe first attracted her attention. Where would she be more likely to find what she came in quest of than in that secure repository.

With beating heart and trembling hands she stooped down and applied a key to the massive lock; the door flew open with a click that made her start back and utter a faint shriek of terror.

It was evident that her nerves were strung to tension; every sound made her start and tremble.

With nervous haste, yet with a sort of methodical order in all her movements, she began to examine the papers one by one, replacing them, too, in regular order, so that she caused no litter or confusion as she proceeded in her search.

At length she folded up the last paper the safe contained with a sigh; the document she wanted was not there.

After locking the door of the iron safe, she rose up and looked about her once more. She was evidently at a loss where to begin after her fruitless search in the strong iron safe.

There were a few old-fashioned cupboards in the room, built into the wall. None of these were locked, yet they were mostly crammed with bundles of legal documents, covered thick with dust.

These she surveyed with a blank look; to go over such a pile of papers one by one would prove a task beyond her powers of endurance.

She thought, also, that there could be but the barest chance of finding what she sought amid that dusty pile. The writing-table would prove a far more likely repository for such an all-important document.

With this consideration she sat down, and began with cool deliberation to unlock the writing-table drawers and examine their contents.

In one secret drawer she found a bundle of letters, carefully tied up with black ribbon sealed with black wax; the packet

was subscribed, "To be delivered by my executor into the hands of Lady Maud Chineron."

The lady turned this packet over in her hand reflectively; then, with a slight red spot appearing on her pale cheeks as though her proud blood rebelled at the base act, she secured them about her own person. There was such a number of drawers well packed with letters and papers that it took some time to examine the contents, and before she had quite finished she heard the outer office door open and some one enter.

The blood thrilled through every vein as she heard a man's heavy tread approach the door of the room in which she sat.

What if he entered and found her rifling the drawers of Alex Cameron's writing-table?

She held her breath to listen.

He was walking to and fro, and, more than once, deep-drawn sighs fell on her listening ear.

At length the footsteps ceased and a silence that could be felt reigned once more.

But alas! she was a prisoner, and must remain in that dreary place until the man, whoever it might be, left the office, as her only means of exit lay through that room.

She had expected to find what she sought during the clerk's dinner hour, but her search had been so far prolonged that the hour had slipped by, and now, doubtless, he would remain until his afternoon's work was done.

It was impossible to sit there idle through two weary hours, so she quietly resumed her search, in no very enviable state of mind, starting and trembling in every limb at the least sound or movement from without.

She did not even rustle the paper as she unfolded one document after another, so cautious was she in her every movement. She was in no hurry, as she thought that two hours, at least, lay before her in the which to finish her search.

At length she had carefully gone through every shelf and drawer, even to the dusty shelves of the unlocked cupboards. Her eyes ached, her hands were black with dust, and yet what she so patiently sought for had not been found.

One key alone remained on the bunch for which she had found no use. She must not overlook any nook or corner, her

search must be thorough: she could never dare venture on such another errand.

As yet she had confined her search to one room; she rather shrank from opening the door that led to an inner chamber, but finding her search vain, she summoned up all her courage and threw open the door. She was not surprised to find herself in a bedroom, rather barely furnished.

What little furniture it contained was covered thick with dust. The place, apparently, had not been entered for some months; the blinds were drawn, but the light was quite strong enough for her to see about her, accustomed as she had been, for the past two hours, to the dim uncertain light that glimmered through the almost closed shutters.

A chest of drawers and an old-fashioned escritoire were the only pieces of furniture at all likely to contain letters or papers of any value.

Without a moment's hesitation she decided to search the escritoire first, but she found it securely locked, and none of the keys she carried fitted into the curious old lock.

This was truly vexatious. She would not have hesitated a moment to break it open, only she dared not make the least noise, with the old clerk within hearing.

Whilst she lingered before it, undecided what to do next, a slight movement behind her made her start and turn hurriedly round towards the door.

There in the dim uncertain light appeared a dark shadowy figure, standing silent, and motionless as the stagnant air that filled the room.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A WOMAN of the strongest nerve would have been overawed at finding herself thus suddenly confronted by such a gruesome apparition in that silent dreary place, which had been, not long since, the scene of such a fearful tragedy.

Even this bold unscrupulous intruder felt a cool sensation of horror creep over her frame as she beheld that dark silent figure standing motionless before her.

She was evidently no weak-minded woman given to superstitious fears, yet, for a moment, she felt as though a spectre had risen from the dead to reproach her; a nameless dread took

possession of her soul. She could not utter a sound had her life depended on the effort. Her tongue clave to the roof of her mouth, her feet felt as though rooted to the spot.

It was only for a few moments that she stood thus, rooted and spell-bound with a great unspoken dread, yet it seemed an age of torture.

She dropped her arms and gave a long shivering sigh, when at length the sound of a human voice fell on her ear.

It was such a relief to find that shadowy figure was mortal, and nothing more; although the voice inquired, rather sternly, what her business might be in that private room.

The question was thrice repeated before she quite realized the awkwardness of her present position.

Then she began to collect her thoughts a little, and cast about in her mind for some excuse to account for her intrusion. At best it was a most unpleasant position in which she found herself, and how to get out of the dilemma without some loss of dignity and self-respect she knew not.

At length she drew herself up and looked the old man steadily in the face.

"You are Mr. Cameron's clerk, I presume?" she said in a tone of cool self-possession that surprised Mr. Merryman into momentary admiration of her tact and wonderful presence of mind.

"Yes, my lady, I am his clerk at your service," he answered with a bow, as he advanced farther into the room and stood erect before her.

"Ah, well, you know me—and—and of course you are aware that I am an old friend of Mr. Cameron."

"I have seen your ladyship before—but pray excuse me, I must know your errand here, in this room, and at once," replied the old clerk somewhat peremptorily.

"Oh, I have not any particular errand here, my good man," said she, with a contemptuous elevation of her eyebrows. "As I did not find any one in the office when I came, I merely looked about me to pass the time until your return."

"And locked yourself in for that purpose, no doubt, my lady," answered Merryman with bitter irony.

To this she made no reply, but began to move leisurely towards the door, as if about to leave the room.

The old clerk was so taken aback by her cool effrontery that

he did not move a hand to stay her progress until she reached the outer chamber, then he made a sudden bound and stood close in front of her.

"You do not stir another step, Lady Chineron!" he cried hotly, "until you have told me the reason of your surreptitious visit to my employer's private rooms."

She drew herself up haughtily.

"How dare you assume this tone to me?"

Her voice was cold and stern, but her lips trembled as she asked the question.

"I have merely demanded to know your business here, and until I know it you attempt to leave this room at your peril," said the old clerk doggedly.

"What! You know me, and yet you venture to threaten me with violence? You forget yourself, sir. I am not aware that I have refused to state my business, but certainly I decline to submit to any more rudeness from a paid hireling."

The old clerk drew back, cowed by her cool, resolute attitude.

It began to dawn on his mind that he had been rude and somewhat hasty: what power had he to detain her against her will?

"Of course I cannot compel your ladyship to speak," he replied in an altered tone, "but I think that you must see for yourself that your presence here requires some explanation, but—" and here a sudden thought appeared to strike him, as his eye fell on the spot on which she stood—"but pardon me if, for the moment, I forgot that this place must necessarily possess a most melancholy interest in your eyes. It was in this room that your son died by his own hand—your feet are even now resting on the spot where he fell—it was his life-blood that caused that dark indelible stain close before you."

She cast a shuddering glance at the floor, turning pale as death, then, with a low agonized cry, she gathered her long trailing robe around her and fled.

The old clerk looked quite dazed for the moment at the effect his words produced, and did not put forth the least effort to stay her flight.

One object had occupied his mind so much of late that his perception had become dulled; he was slow to comprehend any new or sudden event, and this surreptitious visit of Lady Chineron

to his employer's chambers struck him, as he said, "all of a heap."

He placed his finger on his lip and began to consider what possible motive could have induced this proud patrician dame to come stealthily prying about the chambers.

He began to make a careful survey of the place ; nothing had been disturbed as far as he could see. The drawers were all locked and the great iron safe remained intact. The bookshelves were covered with dust ; nevertheless, to make sure, he touched the secret spring at the back and disclosed the iron safe ; this he unlocked and found the packet intrusted to his care untouched.

She did not gain much by prying about, he thought. Perhaps he had disturbed her before she had accomplished her object.

But how did she get in ? He was certain the door of the inner office was locked when he went out to his dinner. In fact the door had not been unlocked, as far as he knew, for the past month or more.

And he had found her locked in, without any key left in the door.

He had never noticed the keys hanging behind the old shooting jacket ; had no idea, indeed, that Alex Cameron had forgotten, at the last moment, to take his office keys with him.

After vainly puzzling his head as to how it was possible for the lady to have gained an entrance during his short absence, he decided to ring for the housekeeper. It was just possible she possessed a master-key to the chambers and had let the intruder in.

Mrs. Trimble, however, was as much surprised as the old clerk himself to know that he had found a lady locked in the chambers on his return after dinner.

"It must be the same lady who called a little while ago to see you about Freda," said she, after getting a full description of the visitor from the old clerk. "She said she would call again, but how she got into the office to day I cannot imagine."

"Did you let her in when she called ?" he asked quickly.

Mrs. Trimble was not equal to evading the question, or telling a direct falsehood to screen herself, therefore she reluctantly confessed that at the lady's urgent request she had let her in, but that she did not stay long.

"Did you leave her alone ?" was his next question.

"Only for just one minute, whilst I fetched her a glass of water," said Mrs. Trimble quite flustered. "You don't think she came here to rob the office, do you, sir?"

Merryman shook his head with a bewildered air. "Do you know who that lady is?" he asked, by way of answer to her question.

"She didn't give her name, but she struck me as being some grand lady from the first moment I laid eyes on her. She did say, however, that she was a friend of Mr. Cameron, and had come to inquire after Freda at his particular request."

"No doubt she is a friend of his," said the old clerk with an air of mystery, "but that is not the reason she takes such a deep interest in Freda and her mother."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mrs. Trimble, catching her breath in her eagerness to know more. "Might that lady be any relation of the poor young lord who——?"

"The name of the lady is Chineron; now you can guess why she takes such an interest in Freda."

"An' to think I told her that you had a fortune left in your hands for that child an' her mother!" cried Mrs. Trimble, quite taken aback.

"Ah, you told her that, did you?" said the old clerk with an air of vexation. "You must have had a long talk with her. Pray what made you take a person into your confidence without even knowing her name?"

"Well, really, I hardly know," answered Mrs. Trimble quite crestfallen; "but you see she had such a way with her, an' seemed to know Mr. Cameron so well, that I was quite thrown off my guard; yet, if she is Lady Chineron, it's quite natural she should want to know all about poor little Freda."

"That's true," answered the clerk reflectively; "but, whatever her motive may be, you are not to let her enter Mr. Cameron's chambers again on any pretence whatever."

After the housekeeper left him alone the old clerk examined the locks carefully. They certainly had not been tampered with; but after a few minutes' intent thought an idea appeared to strike him. Then he locked up everything carefully and went out.

In about half-an-hour he returned, followed by a locksmith and his workman.

When Mr. Merryman left the office later on, he had the satis-

faction of knowing that his employer's chambers were secured from future intrusion by an iron bar and a Chubb lock, of which he carried the key.

CHAPTER XXXII.

RATHER more than a year went by, after Alex Cameron left England, without much apparent change with regard to Baron Mannheim's numerous financial schemes.

He was quite as *débonnaire* and open-handed as of old, and equally well received on 'Change and in society.

Fashionable folk of light and leading still continued to welcome him in their midst, although it's true he no longer found himself the hero of the hour ; some other, if not brighter star, had risen on fashion's horizon and some new fad had superseded last season's hobby.

The Rev. Roland Pumpnickel was a great authority at this time ; the Duchess of Mervilleuse sat under him, and quoted him, and professed to believe in him. He belonged to the æsthetic school, and held forth on the science of the perception of perfect harmony in art and nature.

Education, he declared, was the only thing to elevate the masses ; he would have their life made beautiful by the contemplation of perfection.

It was clearly a feminine mission—who but the high-born, the woman of gentle birth and breeding, could elevate the common herd ?

To elevate the masses with harmonious sounds was to open up their perceptions to everything that was grand and beautiful.

No sooner had this idea taken hold in the world of fashion than musical classes, for the elevation and purification of the masses, became the rage.

Lady Dorothy Plantagenet, foremost in all good works, hired a large room in Gravel Lane, where she formed evening classes for teaching harmony and the grammar of music to match-makers, factory girls and washerwomen.

Indeed, it suddenly dawned on the aristocratic intellect that the masses were passionately fond of high-class music ; and to provide this class of entertainment, free, for the million, was clearly the crying necessity of the age.

Suitable halls and concert rooms were sought out in low

localities, and a score or more of titled dames volunteered to discourse sweet sounds to the great unwashed.

Limp lords and lackadaisical ladies took infinite pains to decorate the orchestra with choice exotic plants and flowers, gilt chairs, soft carpets and velvet hangings, "a thing of beauty" that would prove a joy to East-enders for many a day.

Lady Clara Vere de Vere elected, herself, to warble "Home, sweet Home," to the dwellers in slums and common lodging-houses; and the Duchess of Mervilleuse executed a sonata on an Erard's grand piano, surrounded by light and flowers, to a gaunt assemblage of hunger and rags.

Certainly it was much nicer to sit far apart, surrounded by flowers and perfume, than to offend one's olfactory nerves by going amongst the evil-smelling tatterdemalion crowd.

One gushing young lady, of uncertain age, however, went yet further; she took her stand at the main entrance of the concert hall, braving the cold draught, until her cheek and nose turned to the hue of sweet violets, holding in her hand a basket of flowers, and presented a choice bouquet to each woman as she entered.

The basket had cost a guinea, and its contents cost far more than would have furnished forth a substantial meal to the motley, half-famished crowd, that had come together to see the swells, without the least idea of elevating their moral condition.

"Light, music and flowers!" cried Lady Clara Vere de Vere gushingly, "is so supremely elevating—the masses adore music!"

"Ah, yes, quite so," broke in the Rev. Roland Pumpernickel; "but if we could only rear a temple of music for the masses, where they could resort to drink in the first principles of true harmony, they would no longer be content with ugliness and squalor; no, believe me, harmony alone can purify and elevate the hewers of wood and drawers of water, and raise them out of the slough of despond in which we find them."

The Duchess of Mervilleuse, who was passionately fond of music, caught at the idea with enthusiasm.

A temple of harmony for the masses must be built forthwith. A committee was formed, with the duchess at their head, for this object; and plans for the building were invited to be sent in from the most eminent architects.

Very soon her town mansion overflowed with plans and papers relative to this grand temple of music for the multitude.

At length a plan was decided on and a site selected, regardless of expense.

There was one drawback, however—money was not so easy to find as the plan and the site.

Lords and ladies admired and approved of it all. They gave their countenance to the affair—nothing more.

Where, then, could the money be found to raise this much-needed temple in all its gorgeousness and spectacular glory?

Why, in the City, as a matter of course. The merchant princes were known to be as generous as they were rich; men who subscribed their thousands where Lord Pinchbeck put himself down for a guinea.

The Duchess of Mervilleuse decided that Baron Mannheim should be taken into their counsel; she was certain he would head the subscription with a thousand guineas, if she were properly civil to him.

The duchess, however, reckoned this time without her host.

He shrugged his shoulders, when in her most winning manner she laid the plan of the Temple of Harmony before him, and declined not only to head the subscription list, but to subscribe at all.

After that she failed to receive him graciously, becoming unaccountably hard of hearing whenever he ventured to address her.

This might be considered the turning-point in his fashionable career, or his first step on the road to Coventry; as many ladies of distinction followed the lead given by her grace, and not only became deaf to his conversation, but also too near-sighted to see him.

In the City the financial sky had suddenly become overcast with clouds, which lowered ominously over Cowl Court.

Promises unfulfilled, like hope deferred, maketh the heart sick, and relations were becoming strained between the baron and his numerous clients.

Much discontent had been expressed from time to time, in the hearing of the clerks, by the crowd that waited daily in the outer office to gain an interview with the baron.

It was not the clerks' business, however, to listen to the complaints of disappointed clients. In fact they took no heed of

them, and bent over the ponderous ledgers unmoved, making entries as calmly as though they were the only occupants of that business-like edifice.

The first of the baron's financial schemes to yield to the strain was the Grebenski Gold Mining Company.

The shareholders all at once became discontented, even clamorous.

Ugly reports floated about the City, in which the word swindle was frequently heard.

The shares, which had risen, not long since, to ten pounds premium, were now quite unsaleable in the open market.

Some luckless speculator had gone in to "bull" the shares, under the implied advice of the baron, and when settling day arrived bankruptcy stared him in the face.

In an evil hour for the baron this luckless wight rushed into print, and the consequence was that the Grebenski Gold Mining Company exploded and fell like a spent rocket into space.

The baron, however, went on his way apparently unmoved. What was it to him if a company in which he was interested suddenly collapsed? Companies were being wound up every day, and the promoters fared none the worse for it, in the opinion of the world.

True, more than one City magnate on 'Change did begin to look askance at the gigantic financier.

Still, as the baron's credit was good at his bankers' and his paper was duly met, no man, as yet, cut him openly.

It was generally reported that the baron had cleared more than a million by floating joint stock companies and lucky speculations on the Stock Exchange, so that few men cared, in this age of progress, to cut a millionaire because he was known to be, at best, nothing but a clever financial machinator.

Possibly it would not, under present circumstances, have proved an easy matter for him to have floated a new company, but then, as he happened to have so many irons in the fire, he was content for the time to keep the forge going.

About this time, also, the committee of the Universal Colonization Company began to get restive.

Up to a certain point, the members of the committee had been most amiable and blindly trustful.

For more than a year not one dissenting voice had been heard

at the board. They met with hand-shakes and parted with congratulations, after duly pocketing their fees and partaking of a sumptuous luncheon.

The baron was a princely entertainer on such occasions, his wines were fit to be set before crowned heads, and the bill of fare would have tempted a conclave of cardinals in Lent.

But a day came when even sumptuous fare and rare wines, failed to mollify the prejudiced members of the committee. After this meeting relations became strained between Baron Mannheim and his *confrères*. Some thought fit to tender their resignation, whilst others, who had something at stake in the concern, set about in right earnest to overhaul the books of the company.

The company's rules and regulations, however, to which they had themselves subscribed, were found to contain so many conditions, wheels within wheels as it were, that they soon found themselves in a hopeless maze, and began to despair of finding any solution of the complex question. The committee found it impossible to agree on any given line of action.

They were powerless to wind up the concern, seeing it was solvent and had various agencies at work in every part of the habitable globe; so chafe as they might, the baron remained master of the situation.

(To be continued.)

Reminiscences of a Visit to India and China.

HOW WE GOT THERE AND HOME AGAIN.

PART III.

ON approaching Hong Kong we steamed past endless mountainous islands; on some of them there was a fair amount of vegetation, which at the time was clothed in the tender verdure of spring. The magnificent harbour seemed all at once to burst upon us as a surprise, alive as it was with shipping of all kinds, including several vessels of the royal navy. Beyond it lay the prettily-shaped island, with "the Peak" and other mountains standing out in fine outline. It is beautifully laid out; numbers of nice villas are scattered about its steep inclines, surrounded by pretty gardens, in which I observed many large pots of the delicious little "Mandarin" orange. The way up to these villas is charmingly wooded and the ground carpeted with ferns and creepers. The quaint town is composed of arcades containing shops of all sorts, a long narrow board hanging outside of each, with the name of the shopkeeper painted on it in Chinese letters. Inside you will always see the occupants busy at work, much pleased if you admire their wares, but never bothering you to buy as the natives of India do; only the "rickshaw" men and the carriers of the sedan-chairs rather plague one to employ them. In one shop we watched a whole family having their meal of tea and rice, eating the latter with chop-sticks. It was such a queer sight, and they appeared quite delighted at being observed, and made us signs of satisfaction. The streets are crowded, everybody seeming very busy, hastening to and fro; in fact apparently as much occupied and with as little time to spare as in the City of London.

The governor and his wife, Sir William and Lady Des Vœux, being both former acquaintances of ours, we at once went to Government House to pay them our respects, when for the first time I experienced being carried in a sedan-chair, which is

the usual mode of conveyance throughout China, although the "jinrickshaw," or "rickshaw," as it is commonly called, being a little two-wheeled carriage drawn by a man, is also sometimes used, but not so universally as the chairs are. These latter can be a very easy, pleasant way of going about, but they can also be much the reverse, for all depends on your "Johnnies," as the British call the Chinese coolies, whether they be chair-carriers, rickshaw boys, servants, or anything else. Some walk smoothly, while others have a sort of high action, which I found caused one great fatigue, and I heard others complain in the same way. Government House is beautifully situated on the edge of the cliff in a lovely garden, with a perfect panorama view of the sea and neighbouring islands, and on a clear day a distant peep of the mainland. Both Sir William and Lady Des Vœux were most kind and invited us to stay with them, but as our visit to the island was to be brief, and part of the time taken up in going to see Canton, we arranged in preference to dine and have luncheon with them whenever we could. They took us out one day in their steam pinnace, when we steamed all round the island and had a good view of its great beauty and of the endless curious Chinese cemeteries, with their quaint-looking graves with pieces of stick fixed at the head of each, on which are inscriptions, those of the rich being in the shape of a horse-shoe and fenced all round.

One day the governor's wife kindly took me for a drive in her victoria, on the only driveable road there is. Her Chinese coachman and footman wore scarlet liveries, but made in the fashion of their own country, consisting of loose tunics with large sleeves, tight trousers, white cotton stockings, Chinese shoes, round black beaver hats with a red button in the centre of the crown and long pigtails. There were besides two outriders of the Sikh police, for a small force of the latter are quartered at Hong Kong to protect the governor and the British inhabitants; for although the Chinese make capital servants and are sometimes faithful, they are not always to be trusted. These Sikhs are splendid-looking men, very tall, with fine figures and handsome faces. Their dress, too, is most becoming, being a tight-fitting red coat, dark blue trowsers and crimson turbans, which were most gracefully draped round their heads. In addition to this force, Chinese police are employed in the native part of the town.

They wear the usual loose blue tunic of the country, with white straw hats much the shape of a basin turned over.

Lady Des Vœux told me that when she first came to the island she had driven without this escort, who were armed and well mounted on Arab steeds from India; but one day, when fortunately her husband was with her, some Chinese, who had just hauled their junk on shore with fish, seeing the carriage, suddenly made for it, as if to attack it, with the view, they thought, of robbing it. Perceiving this, the governor, having been accustomed all his life to half-savage races, very tall man as he was, rose from his seat, stood up in the middle of the victoria and waved his stick above his head in a menacing way towards the advancing fishermen and at the same time he urged his coachman to greater speed. His great figure so unexpectedly rising evidently so startled these natives that they paused, and this allowed time, as the horses had quickened their paces, for the carriage to get swiftly out of reach of pursuit. On his return he mentioned the incident to some of the oldest British officials; the latter then told him that previously all governors had taken an escort of two and even four of these Sikhs when driving, and they strongly advised that this should be done in future. To set against this, his Excellency told me that the Chinese population in Hong Kong, once they have experienced British rule, grow extremely loyal; in fact, the native ingress to the island had had to be rather stopped for fear of its becoming over-populated, as hearing of the advantages their fellow-countrymen had gained from living there, had made many more desirous to become subjects of the Queen of England. Actually 80,000 dollars had been spent in celebrating her Majesty's Jubilee in 1887, the Chinese contributing the larger portion of this sum.

Just before our arrival the jubilee of the island had been celebrated. It seemed most wonderful that it was but fifty years since it had been but a barren rock like many of the islands near, more especially when one went about and saw the many fine buildings and in the suburbs the numbers of beautiful villas; while the streets in the native part of the town consisted of endless shops and were thronged with thousands of men, women and children, all apparently most flourishing.

Chinamen are certainly very funny; the man who waited on me in the hotel was called "Yaa-ou." He told me, "If ring bell

five times, Yaa-ou come and do best for you." He and all the "Johnnies" always said to me, "Yees, saa," as if I was sir! A shopkeeper addressed a letter to me: "No. 2, house up," meaning my room was on the second floor. Much of the "pid-jin" English, as their jargon is termed, was quite incomprehensible to me. I was told that they call a steamer "two piecey bamboo, one piecey puff-puff, walking inside, no can see," if a screw-steamer with one funnel, and "two piecey puff-puff, walking outside, can see," if there are two funnels and paddle-boxes.

I further heard that although Chinamen hold women in contempt, with the usual Oriental idea, as very inferior to men, they all have the greatest respect for their mothers, who hold a great sway over their sons and select who they should marry; but when married the poor daughter-in-law becomes a perfect slave to her mother-in-law; I believe this is rather the case in Japan, too. If dishonour or insult is intended to any one, the pigtail is tied up round the head: in fact, if a Chinaman appears before the foreigner with no pigtail showing, the latter should feel affronted; and British residents assured me that if it should so happen that they were to eat a meal or have to hold any intercourse with a "celestial" and his pigtail was not to be seen, they would be obliged to remonstrate with him and if possible complain of him to one of his own countrymen in a higher or an official position, who would at once reprimand the offender.

On a pouring wet morning quite early we started for Canton in one of the river steamers plying between there and Hong Kong, embarking passengers and crew, all told, to the number of 1,075, over 1,000 being Chinese, including both stewards and crew, the captain, officers and engineers being British or American. Fortunately after two hours it cleared, enabling us to see the pretty shores of the river to great advantage after the refreshing rain; here and there they were wooded, with views of mountains beyond; in parts they were planted with bananas and those delicious fruits, mangoustines and litchiee, the latter being indigenous of China. After some hours, signs that we were approaching the city showed themselves by the increasing number of craft of all sorts, even to a Chinese torpedo boat, followed very soon by our coming in sight of the great feature of Canton, the perfect forest

of house-boats of every kind and size, crammed with men, women and children ; in fact there is a dense population on the river. There are huge theatre house-boats, dancing house-boats ; indeed every kind of occupation and amusement conceivable was going on in these boats, which were all quite filthy, making it truly a painful as well as wonderful sight and a great contrast to further up, where the European quarter is established by the waterside, with its neat detached houses and well laid out " Bund," as the Esplanade is termed in the East. The foreign residents are about 100 in number.

Our first step on arrival was to secure a good guide recommended by the captain of our ship. He introduced to us a clean, rather smart-looking Chinaman, who had a great swagger and a lordly mien, as much as to say : " I am indeed one of the Celestial Empire ! " He was dressed in the inevitable blue, but of fine silk material, not the ordinary blue cotton the coolies and common people wear ; he had on the usual round hat with red button in the middle of the crown and a splendid pigtail ; he smoked cigarettes incessantly the whole time he was with us, making his remarks with great condescension of manner between his puffs, but talking remarkably good English. He took me particularly under his protection in the most patronizing way, calling me " missy " and insisting on my taking his arm whenever on foot, to the intense amusement of all with me.

He conducted us on shore, amidst hordes of the dirtiest of the inhabitants, put us into closed chairs, each carried by three men. We next proceeded from the quay, our guide, in his chair, leading the way to the gate of the city, which had a very ancient appearance, the walls rising up each side from it and completely encircling the whole town. We saw one man, outside the city gate, undergoing the punishment of the stocks, in which his hands and feet were fixed, while he had a spiked collar round his neck ; he was guarded by the Imperial police and soldiers, or " braves," as the latter are called in China, who were sitting, lounging on their haunches, looking more like beggars than anything else, in ragged loose smocks, which had large hieroglyphics painted on them in red and yellow. Our guide told us they were Tartars, as the Emperor could not trust the Cantonese " braves " in their native town, so they are sent elsewhere ; these Tartars are not armed,

as it would not be safe to trust them with weapons, for they might misuse them.*

We first visited the "Five Hundred Buddha Temple," containing five hundred life-size gilt idols of Buddha ; it was explained to us that the reason there are so many is that each represents this prophet in different forms and that he can be all things to all men, and that part of the idols were for the Chinese and the rest for other countries—Indians, Malays, Singalese, &c. Before some of these images "jos-sticks" were burning, being pieces of scented bamboo, smouldering in ashes, placed there by some one who had made a special petition for what this idol was supposed to represent as being able to grant. When speaking English, they call their temples "jos-houses" and their priests "jos-men." I enjoyed much inspecting a silk factory, where we saw the finest materials, of the most delicate hues, being woven ; it was rather refreshing going there on leaving the "City of the Dead." The latter is so called because it consists of a whole street of houses filled with coffins, for it is the custom of the richer Chinese to hire rooms here and to place their dead in them, before interring them ; if they can afford it they take a suite of rooms, a sitting-room and a bedroom, all well furnished, and keep their relatives' remains, if possible, for a whole year, and have their clothes and meals prepared for them daily as if they were alive. Only the wealthy can keep them long, for enormous sums have to be paid for these apartments.

We went to several other temples of lesser interest and to a very high pagoda, which was elaborately carved and very like those one often sees pictures of ; finally, we explored the famous Five-storied Pagoda, from the top of which we had a splendid view of the old city walls, also the European station in the distance, with the beautiful French Roman Catholic Cathedral and its taper spire, which was built more than a century ago. I wished the English Cathedral at Hong Kong had been as fine. We, further, had a full view of the extraordinary scenes we had just been going through ; of the endless filthy streets, so narrow that you could shake hands across from the windows of the very high-storied houses on each side, and of the inter-

* All the Chinese soldiery I saw were of the same description, looking more like beggars and dressed in rags ; no wonder that the Japanese have so easily defeated them during the past months.

minable shops, from those with well-carved furniture, ivory, porcelain, silks and the most costly of wares, to innumerable dirty eating shops, of such an awful description as I hardly like to relate. In addition, barbers were continually to be seen at their doors, shaving men's heads and faces, extracting their eyebrows and eyelashes and brushing out their pigtails, while everywhere the smells were so foul that I was thankful I had a salts bottle with me.

The whole way teemed with thousands upon thousands of men, women and children, all hideous, yelling and screaming at each other, often poking their faces into my chair and shrieking at me, what I believe it was well, I could not understand, for they hate all foreigners, but chiefly the women, and generally curse them as they pass. I felt relieved my "chair" was closed, all but the window, more especially when, shortly after we had started, it knocked over a boy and all the goods he was hawking in the street; my "Johnnies" never stopped, but hurried on through the crowd so quickly that it could not be discovered who had caused the accident. It was a good thing for me they did, for I felt as if my last moment had come when I saw the angry faces round me and heard their discordant voices howling at me, knowing well that, a foreign woman's sedan-chair having caused the catastrophe, I should have been shown no mercy, and we were four unarmed Europeans against this mass of half savages. Not many young women were to be seen about, for the men do not like their wives to go out much, but numbers of old women, some with feet, I am sure, not more than two inches long, besides scores of children and poor little babies tied up in the barbarous fashion of the country. I was told that the Cantonese being so much a water population, the women's feet are not crushed up to the same extent as in many places.

To return to the Five-storied Pagoda. It is at the extreme edge of the city; it had formerly been used as a temple and contains the most grotesque carved figures, but it now serves as a watch tower, for it stands very high, besides being a lofty building, so that from the roof the country round can be most extensively surveyed. The guardian of the pagoda supplied us with tea in cups with tops to them, according to the habit of the land; he first placed the tea-leaves at the bottom of the cup, then poured enough hot water over them for one cup, replacing

the top, left it thus to stand for two minutes and then poured the tea into another cup, also with a top to it, from which one sipped at the edge, holding the cover on as you drank : if you required a second cup, more hot water was poured over the leaves, and after standing the tea is again put into the other cup to drink from.

By this time, being past 6 p.m., at which hour the city gates are closed, we had to return to our ship through the European quarter, and from the Bund we got into a "sanpan" with a whole Chinese family living on it, the husband rowing while the wife steered us back to our steamer, just in time for dinner. We had arranged to sleep on board, for we knew how much more comfortable we should be in our good clean cabins, with a regular bedstead, armchairs, sofa and tables in them, than in a very doubtful hotel. After dinner I amused myself watching the crew playing dominoes and cards, which latter were rather long and about one inch wide. Before sailing on our return journey the next morning, we had just time to go on shore to do a little shopping, when the bargaining was most amusing ; our guide of the previous day went with us, accompanying us back to the ship, where he took quite a tender farewell of us all, making many ridiculous, would-be complimentary speeches, still puffing cigarettes all the time. I could not help thinking how strange it was that all this vast company of people should be perfectly hideous, the perpetual ugly blue usually worn making them still more unpleasing to the eye and such a contrast to the graceful, good-looking natives of India in their picturesque colours. The upper and middle classes, though, often wear rich greens and browns mixed with yellow, of the choicest materials, which make a fairly good effect.

On reaching Hong Kong the weather was so fine and the atmosphere so clear we determined at once to go up to the "Peak" by the funicular railway, and we were well rewarded, for the view was superb ; we could see for miles and miles all round. I was glad to put on an extra wrap, for it felt somewhat fresh at that height. We found the island, on arriving—the middle of April—pleasantly cool after the places we had lately been in, and I was told it seldom became really sultry much before June. There are a large number of well-situated villas on the mountain, for many of the residents spend the summer there, and if the men

have to work below during the day, they run up by train in the evening to sleep on the "Peak."

Before sailing the next day we went to look at the race-course, and were surprised to find such a good one; it is so remarkable, it matters not in what part of the world "John Bull" settles down, he has not been there long before a race-course is established and golf-links. We had a very chilly and unpleasant voyage from Hong Kong; I had been warned that it was always tempestuous on these seas and bitterly cold, and I found the warning truly verified. Our ship was one of the French Messagerie Company's; the food was excellent, quite dainty for sea fare, but both saloons and cabins were uncomfortable, and I was not sorry after two days and two nights to land at Shanghai, though in pouring rain; this rain continued the whole of the next day, which happened to be Sunday, so I took a "rickshaw" and drove to the Cathedral, where I found not more than half-a-dozen people, owing to the inclemency of the weather; this was the sixth English cathedral I had come upon in my extensive travels.

On Monday it cleared, so on receiving a very civil invitation from the stewards of the course to attend the races, which were to take place that day, we went and saw the "Shanghai Derby" run! The course is a very good one, with a capital stand, and has a fair-sized grass lawn in front of it to walk about on. There are no paddocks, but we inspected several of the ponies in their stables near. The jockeys are not professionals, for the owners or a friend ride these ponies, which are all natives of China; the riders are well turned out and looked most sporting in their respective colours. An excellent luncheon was provided behind the stand, to which we were kindly invited.

The drive to the course was most entertaining; we passed through several bazaars and curious-looking streets, all gaily decorated with flags and flowers, for the day of the races is quite as much a gala day with the natives as with the foreign residents. We saw carriages upon carriages of the upper class Chinese all wending their way there, besides many on foot. Some of these vehicles were most gorgeous; they were chiefly victorias, the panels being beautifully coloured; one was painted all gold, and little mirrors were fixed the whole way round it, while the harness was glittering with gilt and was gay with ribbons and flowers.

The inmates, especially the women, were gaudily arrayed in the richest silks and satins, their hair being most elaborately done up according to the fashion of their country, and adorned with large combs and wax flowers, while on their necks, which were bare, owing to their collars being low, they had placed pearl necklaces besides other costly jewels. Their faces were deeply enamelled, their cheeks and lips were brilliantly rouged and they wore nothing on their heads, but used fans for a protection from the sun; they really did very much resemble the figures and faces one often sees depicted on fire-screens.

As soon as the races were over, being still early we took a drive in the country round, which was flat and uninteresting, only I enjoyed the fresh green everywhere, after the parched look of the tropical lands we had so lately left. We found Shanghai very cold and were glad of fires, although it was the end of April. The European part of the town is decidedly fine, with good public buildings and well laid-out public gardens along the Bund. It is a remarkable place, considering it is purely cosmopolitan, consisting of French, British and Germans, the first-named being the original settlers, having come there from the old French colony in Cochin China. It is under the Chinese Imperial Government, who allow three jurisdictions, namely, a French, a British and a Chinese one. I was told the "Celestials" often take their cases to the British court, thinking they get more justice dealt to them in it than in their own. At the time, an amusing anecdote was going about, of a Chinaman suing for a divorce from his wife. When asked why he wished to part with her, he replied: "Because she too muchee talkee, she too muchee snoree, she too muchee dink Eulopean blandy and she too muchee no good at all!" Chinatown, as the native quarter is always called, is very similar to Canton, and I heard that throughout the country the towns all resemble each other.

The next day I visited the French Institute, kept by a sisterhood for the education of girls of all nations, a great boon to parents, who can there obtain really good instruction for their children irrespective of their religion. One of the sisters is English, another is German and the rest with the mother superior are French; thus all these languages are taught. Among the scholars were a few boarders who paid, others being motherless, and the fathers glad to find such a good home for

them to be brought up in ; there were also a great many day pupils, while an orphanage is attached to the same building, which is free of all charges, where nearly all are boarders, many of whom are half-caste Chinese, negresses, foundlings, &c. ; with touching stories relating to them. They were of all ages, from babies up to eighteen, and seemed both happy and well cared for. The superior was a dear old lady, apparently adored by all, but particularly by the poor little orphans, whom she treated quite as her own children. She told me she had come out from France twenty-three years ago and had only been home once since ; she further told me much that was most interesting concerning the Roman Catholic mission work in China, which dated back from the sixteenth century, and that there were now numbers of Christian Chinese, some of whom were sisters-of-mercy, who had descended from ancestors who had been martyred at that distant period for embracing Christianity. She took me into their small cathedral, which adjoins the institute and is very beautiful. Owing to this strong French element, the natives often mix expressions from this language with their "pidgin" English ; for instance, they sometimes say "No savey," for, "I don't know."

That evening we embarked on board of a big steamer, with the view of going up the Yang-ste-Kiang river to Hankow, which is from six to seven hundred miles in the interior. This river is the second longest in the world, being four thousand miles in length ; at one part it is six miles in width, so that you could not see both banks at once. A portion of the latter were so green and pretty with views of distant mountains beyond, of woods clothed in the fresh garb of spring and fruit trees in blossom ; while other parts were quite wild with copse-wood, and reminded me of Scotland, especially on going by a curious big rock in the middle of the river, which recalled the Bass Rock on the east coast. We continually passed various-shaped pagodas, temples, and here and there strong fortifications, also Chinese ships of all sorts, including men-of-war, generally British built, each with their "eye,"—our own vessel having one too—painted on the bows, as Chinamen say otherwise they could not see ! We saw some enormous rafts, which were so huge they were almost like a village ; several families were living on them besides pigs and chickens. We stopped at each port, and I really

think the taking on and the putting off at all these ports was even a more curious sight than when coasting off Southern India. At one of them two mandarins with their "braves" (soldiers) came on board, the latter being dressed in much the same way as those at Canton. We touched at Nankin and Kiukiang. Both these places are famous for their manufacture of porcelain; at the latter I purchased some. Our captain, officers and engineers were all British or American, while both crew and stewards were Chinese, and all the first-class passengers were English "charsees," as the tea merchants are called.

Hankow is a very small settlement; it was ceded to Great Britain by China after the war in 1863, to enable the British to carry on the tea trade, but now there are as many, if not more, Russians settled there, for their nation drink Chinese tea in preference to all other, whereas but a small quantity in comparison is sent to the English market. We were first taken round the foreign quarter; it has a very fine Bund and the well-built villas of the residents each had nice gardens round them, in which were masses of China roses in full bloom. On the race-course there was a good stand, and a golf-link close by.

Afterwards we visited St. Joseph's Institute, which is under an Italian sisterhood; it had been started more than twenty-five years ago. It is solely for Chinese; they keep there numbers of decrepit old women, some totally blind, who, because they can no longer work and make money, their families have turned out, for they are a terribly cruel and heartless race. There are seven hundred babies and children in the house, some of which are orphans, while the mothers of many work within the building, for it is entirely self-supporting. We saw work of all kinds being done, especially Chinese clothing of every description, from the finest embroidery in silks to the commonest and coarsest materials used. They were knitting, weaving, sewing, making cotton-wool to line coats or quilts, shoes, caps and hats, the old women being busily employed at separating the good parts of the wool from the bad. The girls are all kept until they are eighteen or nineteen, when they are generally married to those of their countrymen who are Christians; the wedding of one of the girls had taken place that morning in the Roman Catholic Cathedral. Several of the sisters of mercy were Chinese; those who were not, as well as the reverend mother,

were Italians. The latter was such a nice woman, but could only speak "pidgin" English besides her own tongue. She said when they had first started, they tried to do away with the strapping up of the girls' feet, but found it would not answer, for in after life they suffered so much in consequence, as it prevented their marrying, and they themselves would implore, though it hurt them dreadfully, to have their feet tied up in the barbarous fashion of their country, so now they always do it. It appears in some districts this reducing of the feet is not so essential as in others, but round Hankow it is of much importance. The superior told me the summers there are very hot, but the winters are often extremely severe.

In connection with the sisterhood, and adjoining the institute, there is a hospital for both men and women, which is daily and carefully attended by an English resident doctor. A little tale was related to me concerning it, about a girl who had been brought up at St. Joseph's, and who became afterwards a servant in the household of the viceroy of that province. Her master accidentally burnt his arm very seriously while she was in his service; she was so distressed at this that she implored his immediate attendants to persuade him to go to the hospital and get the good sisters to dress it. For some time he refused to do so, but at length he was induced to go, and his arm healed so rapidly, owing to the good care of the sisters, that he had a large board made, and painted on it in Chinese characters the wonders worked in the institution, including the cure of his own arm, and telling all passers-by to show reverence to the sisters. He then sent the board by his "braves," accompanied by a band of music and preceded by a herald, to be fastened up over the door, where it still remains. It struck me as rather curious to see all representations in the chapel of Our Lord and of the Madonna in Chinese clothes, instead of the usual Jewish garments that we are accustomed to see. I was informed, when remarking on this, that unless these representations are thus depicted they do not appeal to the Chinese mind.

One of the tea merchants invited us to go over his factory, which was a very big one, where we saw tea being prepared for exportation in large thick bricks, looking like a huge chocolate cake, for the peasants in Russia and Siberia, besides the finest quality being prepared for the upper classes in Russia. All the

labour was entirely done by the hand, or I should more correctly say by the feet, for the crushing of the leaves and rolling them out was being done by the feet. The coolies employed have to be very civilly treated by the Europeans over them, or they stop work at once, and woe betide what they might not do to their employers.

We had made great friends with one of the European officials to the Imperial government, so he kindly conducted us in his own private chairs through China-town, which was much the same as those already mentioned, only it had been so seldom visited by a foreign woman I proved a great curiosity to the inhabitants, who stared at me as if I was a wild beast ; one little girl of the upper classes making her attendant place her on his shoulder, to get a better view of me. The roofs of some of the temples were covered with Dunmore tiles, which made a very good effect. All plays are acted in the temples, and I regretted I had no opportunity of attending one. After climbing a steep hill, from which we had a splendid view, we came to "No. one jos-house," as the principal temple is called ; "No. one jos-man" (the chief priest) inviting us into his little room, which was very dirty and smelt horribly ; he insisted on giving us tea, and he let off fireworks in honour of a visit from foreigners.

Our friend in the Imperial service had suggested our endeavouring to get an introduction to the viceroy, that we might thereby see the interior of his palace and get a peep of life among the better classes, but the British consul would not sanction it, as he said the people on the opposite shores of the river, where the governor resided, were so unfriendly to strangers it would not be safe, and that, though his "braves" would be sent to escort us, it was well known they were not to be relied on, and certainly, when only rowing under the banks, the inhabitants scowled and shouted at us. We were therefore taken instead to see a gun-boat of the Imperial navy, which lay at anchor a little way off, being kept there for the viceroy's use whenever he needed it. We were rowed to it in one of the boats belonging to the Imperial service, the boatmen wearing picturesque liveries of white and blue, and the white standard with the five-clawed dragon flying at our helm. The captain and officers all received us most cordially, standing in a row, dressed in their national costumes, which look like dressing-gowns of brown satin ;

they wore skull-caps and pigtails and had fans in their hands. Fortunately the governor's secretary, the only good-looking Chinaman I have seen, was calling on them at the time, for he spoke English fluently and acted as interpreter, having been educated at the University at Edinburgh, where he was named Hong-Ben-dor, while the British at Hankow called him Mr. Koo. He was evidently unusually intelligent, and belonged to the advanced party in China, who are eager for the opening up of the country ; he told us, with decided satisfaction, that the grant had just been received from Pekin for a railway from that part of the river where the larger navigation had to cease, right up to the capital. Many of the English had already pointed out to us the great advancement that had lately been made by the Chinese towards more development in civilization, and how they had also begun to imitate some of the modern improvements which had been made by the Europeans. Curiously enough, only shortly after we left did we hear that after all the advanced party had moved too rapidly, for riots broke out all along the valley of the Yang-ste, which, though reported to be caused by the missionaries setting up the backs of the people, were really owing to the project of making a railway to Pekin, the natives considering this opening up of the country would be the letting in of the foreigner, for whom they have ever had from time immemorial such an implacable hatred. At one port the British Consulate was attacked and looted, the consul and his wife escaping for their lives in the disguise of Chinese clothes, the viceroy being obliged to go and quell the riot in the gun-boat that we had been on, all navigation on the river being stopped until the British fleet arrived to protect vessels. In consequence the said railway had to be abandoned.

The captain took us all over his ship, which had been built at Glasgow and was manned with Lord Armstrong's guns ; the crew were all Chinese, like the officers, but the engineers were Europeans. The saloon was beautifully fitted up with panels inlaid with mother-of-pearl, the sofas being covered with exquisitely embroidered satin. The officers regaled us with tea, served in delicate porcelain cups with tops to them, from which we had to sip the tea, holding on the covers all the time ; I feared much lest every minute I should let this fragile china drop. Mr. Koo told us that Hankow and its neighbourhood was the most important

commercial centre of the empire and the most ancient and interesting port classically to his fellow-countrymen. He was full of the Czarewitch's* visit there, which had just taken place before our arrival. He remarked that he supposed this tour that H. I. H. was making in the East was to remind China that there was such an empire as Russia, for as far as his travels educating him, that he was so surrounded by his attendants he had not been allowed to see or to learn much for himself. He said a command had come from Pekin to the viceroy to entertain the prince, so that a great banquet had been given ; but although the orders were for French, as the diplomatic language, to be spoken, Prince George of Greece, who was accompanying his cousin in his travels, at once began to talk English, the Czarewitch doing the same, and in consequence the whole company followed suit ; thus at a Chinese complimentary dinner to a Russian prince the language spoken was English. On leaving, Mr. Koo and the captain both presented us with their visiting cards, which consisted of large pieces of scarlet paper with their names on them in Chinese characters.

The following day we left Hankow ; the captain of our steamer gave me on our voyage down river an account of an awful fire on his former ship. It was believed that some of the Chinese passengers had wickedly set fire to the vessel, in order during the panic to rob their fellow-travellers. He said but for their brutality, as they were not far from land, all lives might have been saved ; but actually the men seized the women, tore from them their earrings or whatever jewels they might have on, and then held them under the water to drown. It is not surprising they have no feeling but animosity towards the foreigner, considering they could act thus to their own countrymen.

On our return we stayed but one night at Shanghai, and then embarked by the Japan mail for that lovely country of the Rising Sun. It was a beautiful spring morning, and at the mouth of the river we passed the whole Chinese fleet, drawn up in line, waiting to be reviewed by the viceroy, who had come down river for that purpose. Presently his gun-boat hove in sight, with the large imperial standard of the gold dragon on a white ground flying from her stern, while smaller bunting of

* Now the Czar Nicholas II.

every shade and hue up to her mast-head fluttered in the breeze. Instantly the Chinese sailors, in their scarlet uniforms and pig-tails too, manned their yards on each of the men-of-war, while the latter let off a salute of twenty-one guns from their broadsides, which were promptly answered by the viceroy's ship, as she rapidly steamed down the lines, causing a deafening sound, and the whole scene forming a magnificent spectacle.

In my next narrative I shall hope to relate our adventures in Japan, as well as on our homeward journey across the Pacific and through America.

L. A. L.

In an Italian Garden.

A STORY.

By "SPAIN,"

Author of "A FRENCH EPISODE," etc., etc.

"IT is certainly a most extraordinary state of things," Mr. Jack Mowbray was saying to himself, as he made himself as comfortable as circumstances permitted in the Italian express bound for Naples, which was whirling him northwards, "most extraordinary!" And so in truth it was.

He had been spending a few weeks with an old friend in Southern Italy, a Captain Charles Upton, who had inherited lately a small estate there. His father had bought it early in the fifties, and had turned the rambling old palace which stood in the middle of it into a comfortable dwelling-house suited to English requirements, without interfering unduly with its fine outlines. His wife detested Italian life, but rather than be separated from the husband to whom she was warmly attached for even a few months of the year, she had resolutely hidden her dislike from him and had now come to regard it as her home, since so many happy memories clung about it. She was a charming woman, about fifty-five years of age, and quite crippled by rheumatism; her son had left the army on his father's death, and the two had settled down together in this lovely spot for some nine months every year contentedly enough.

Captain Upton was, as his friends said, rather a "peculiar" man. He was reserved and silent, but those who knew him well were aware that a very tender heart was hidden under the hard outer shell which most people found it so difficult to penetrate. Jack Mowbray was one of the few who had the key to the citadel; the two men were about the same age, some thirty-five years.

Santa Croce—though that, for obvious reasons, is not its real name—is indeed a most beautiful place. Probably it is not unfamiliar to some of my readers, for in old Mr. Upton's time a visitors' book was kept, in which the tourists who visited the

historic little town on the seashore below were permitted to inscribe their names, and were shown over the fairy garden, with its deep fish-ponds and its wealth of flowers, as well as over certain parts of the strange old building not in actual use by the family, if they so desired it. But as the village—half at least of which belongs to its English landlord—is perched high up on the mountain-side, and is only reached by a long climb of some three hours or so, not a great many of these transient globe-trotters ever rang the great bell at the outer gate, though those who did so sometimes bore world-known names. When the present owner came into the property, he caused a notice to be placed in Donna Teresa's great dining-hall in the much-frequented inn of the town below, stating that only personal friends could be admitted to an inspection of the house and grounds. The very day of his arrival there he had come upon a personally-conducted party contentedly wandering in and out among the flower beds, after picnicing close to his study window, and this was exactly the kind of thing which a man of his temperament would find unendurable. They had no idea the house was inhabited, they had replied when remonstrated with, and indeed as he had come there unexpectedly a week before the day he had appointed, they were not so very much to blame after all. The chief sinner was the guardian of the outer gate, Tonino, who had supposed the captain to be in the vineyard and safely disposed of for the morning; when the eager tourists offered him several dirty paper *lire* he thought he would be tempting Providence if he did not avail himself of the chance put in his way. If the captain was not to be found, how could his permission be asked?

"That is all very well, Tonino," his master had answered when these and many more excuses had been volubly offered. "But remember it is not to occur again. I will raise your wages a little, and you must be content with that, or take yourself off altogether."

There was plenty of occupation in the wild, lonely spot where the English household had chosen to locate themselves. The soil was extremely productive and the people very poor; it was therefore manifestly the duty of the owner to develop his resources and benefit his humble neighbours, and the task was congenial to him. The last ten years of his life had been passed in hot climates; the brilliant Italian winter sunshine and the

invigorating air of the sea beneath and the hills above suited him exactly. In summer he would go yachting, or accompany his mother to England, returning to Santa Croce in time for the vintage, for he was justly proud of the wine which the estate produced, as well as of the lemons and oranges which grew so luxuriantly on the warm slopes. The odd part of it was that they did not seem to care to fill the house with guests, as Jack Mowbray himself would have done.

There was, however, now another inmate in the household, of a totally different type, and it was her presence there which had given rise to the thought in the mind of the aforesaid gentleman with the utterance of which my story opens. Jack was given to talk to himself a good deal, and that is how we come to know how he regarded the matter. This inmate, Miss Milly Caruthers, was a girl of two-and-twenty, the orphan daughter of a cousin of Mrs. Upton, who had been brought up in a country house in a remote Scotch village by her guardian, an old gentleman highly respected by those about him, but otherwise totally unfit for the charge which had been imposed upon him. Fortunately he had been aware of his own shortcomings and had done his best to supply the deficiency by handing over his ward to the care of a kindly, motherly lady whom he engaged to come and live under his roof, at a salary large enough to have tempted her to remain there, even if she had not at once conceived a strong affection for her pupil. Then the uncle himself had departed this life, and his deputy, Mrs. Marsden, had declared her intention of ending her days among her own people. Mrs. Upton had been applied to respecting Milly's future arrangements; she had replied by inviting the girl to pay her a long visit.

It should also be mentioned that though Milly had led a very lonely life, one playfellow, Mrs. Marsden's only son, Willie, had been permitted to share her leisure hours for a few days now and then during his holidays, but as this young gentleman seemed to grow up much faster than was at all necessary, Milly's guardian had suggested, a year or two before his death, that it might be as well that these visits should cease, and she had not seen her old playfellow for several years before her arrival at Santa Croce. She was herself a sweet-looking girl, with a complexion that bespoke perfect health, and a round and charming little figure; but

she had something of the same nature as her second cousin, Captain Upton—she was intensely reticent and chary of speech.

"She is good and true," Jack Mowbray decided, after he had been a week or two in the house. "There is a great deal more in that girl than appears on the surface; if she were my wife I should trust her entirely, and you cannot say that of too many women now-a-days. Why on earth doesn't Charley marry her straight off? I suppose he means to, or they would not keep her in the house. She has enough to live on and could be easily provided for in England;" this, it need scarcely be explained, was another soliloquy. When he got into the train at V—— *en route* for Naples, it was this subject which was occupying his thoughts, and the reader will soon understand that he was justified in considering that the state of things at Santa Croce was in truth very extraordinary indeed. Now, perhaps, we had better return there, and watch the course of events.

Mrs. Upton was, as has been said, an invalid, as far as the use of her lower limbs was concerned, and lived in a suite of rooms on the ground floor of the palace. On the floor above were her son's quarters, and next to these some half-a-dozen pretty, sunny rooms, belonging to Milly Carruthers and the elderly English maid who attended to her special needs. Mrs. Upton lived entirely in her own part of the house, though Milly and her son always paid her a daily visit, but in reality the suffering woman preferred to be alone with the memories which were so dear to her, and which the presence of others seemed to her to interfere with in some fashion. Her son on his part appeared also to prefer his own company, though he liked to have Milly about, for the surroundings of his home seemed wanting in completeness without a lady at the head of the table and in the drawing-room in the long winter evenings.

They kept foreign hours as far as their meals were concerned, and the twelve o'clock breakfast and seven o'clock dinner were partaken of in company, though without the presence of Mrs. Upton, who never came to that part of the house, and it was this state of things which, naturally enough, struck Jack Mowbray with astonishment when he became a member of the household. There would be also afternoon tea in the drawing-room or on the terrace which looked down over the sea, and after or before this function, according to the season of the year, Captain Upton

would take his cousin for a ride among the mountains around them, both of them mounted on huge, strong donkeys, brought from the island of Pantelleria, which lay towards the south. Sometimes in the early morning, after they had had coffee in their own quarters, the two would stroll about the garden or vineyard together, consulting about the flower-beds, feeding the gold and silver fish, or talking over some new book which had lately arrived from England, all in the world like a strongly-attached brother and sister, and though this kind of close intimacy had been going on for nearly a whole year nothing had as yet come of it.

In England, of course, such an arrangement would hardly have been possible, but in South Italy one can do as one likes, as Mrs. Upton remarked once to a friend, who had ventured to suggest that there was a slight flavour of impropriety about the whole proceeding. She had repeated the remark to her son, and since that no English visitor had been invited to the house except Jack Mowbray, who might be trusted, his friend knew, to keep his opinions to himself. Milly was a pleasant adjunct to the household; she taught the village children to read, looked after the satellites in the kitchen, and seemed perfectly happy in the state of life in which she had been placed. Indeed, she evinced a strong desire to remain out of her native country, and in deference to her wish, they had all spent the previous summer in Switzerland.

"The place is at its loveliest just now," Captain Upton was saying to her, one glorious spring day in March, as they sauntered round the garden. Milly was gathering flowers for the house, and dropping them into a basket which he held for her. "But do you know, my mother and I have been thinking that you, on the contrary, have not been looking your best of late. She says that you declare yourself to be perfectly well, and if that is so, there must be some other reason for those pale cheeks we have been noticing lately. Is it that you find the life here too dull and monotonous, I wonder? Do you perhaps feel the want of a girl friend—sometimes? If so, I wish you would tell us."

"No, no," she replied hastily, and there was no want of colour in her cheeks now. "I am happier than I thought it possible to be here, and if you don't find me in the way, I hope you will let me stay."

"My dear Milly, what a way to put it! We are, as you know, delighted to have you, but——" and he stopped, not wishing to utter what was in his mind. He did not often say as much as this, for he was a man who liked people to take things for granted, but the fact was, he was certain that he had seen the traces of tears in his cousin's eyes more than once of late, and this disturbed him not a little. He had not mentioned this to his mother, feeling that the girl would give her confidence if she desired to do so; her nature was, he knew, very like his own, and though the two women were the best of friends, he had a sort of idea that Milly might prefer to consult him about any trouble she might have, knowing that he would more readily understand her.

"All the same it is rather an unnatural life for you, when one comes to think of it," he continued. "When Mowbray was here, he took occasion to make that remark, and I could not contradict him. I am afraid it is rather selfish of us to keep you shut up here without a companion, when—as he also remarked—most people would ask a lot of visitors to make the place a little more lively for you. If there is any one you would like to have, my mother would write an invitation at once, you know."

"I always tell you the truth, don't I, Charley?" was the reply.

"I am sure you do."

"Then believe me when I say the one thing I desire is to go on living my present life, without any change whatever. I should hate to see the house full of visitors."

"So should I," he answered, much relieved. He too was perfectly content, and was glad to believe the girl beside him was of the same opinion.

There was a long silence between them; Milly announced at last that she had gathered flowers enough and that she was going to sit on the terrace and arrange them.

"I will come with you, if you will let me," he said. Her companionship was becoming very pleasant to him, and then he still had an uneasy feeling that all was not quite right with her.

"Oh surely," she answered. "But I thought you were always too busy at eleven o'clock to bestow your company on me."

"It is only a little after ten, and I am going to give myself a holiday for once," and then he found a shady seat for her, and brought a table close to it for her flowers and vases. He sat down at her side and watched her idly for a time, wondering a

little what was in her mind. He knew very little about women, and had never been much in their company; Milly suited him exactly. There was no self-consciousness about her, or nonsense of any kind; her eyes would meet his own with a frank, clear gaze, and he could see she was as innocent as a child. But he was only human after all, and of late he had been aware that some strange new feeling had begun to stir within him which he did not care to analyze; this morning a sudden desire had come to him to see more of his cousin and to get her, if possible, to tell him something of her former life, about which she had always been strangely silent.

"Milly," he said at last, "may I ask you a question?"

"Yes," she answered, rather surprised, and then as her eyes met his and she saw a look in them which she had never noticed before, a bright colour came into her cheeks. He noted the fact; and wondered a little.

"I want you to tell me if you have ever had a love affair?"

The question was the one she had least expected; she answered somewhat hurriedly: "No, at least not a real one."

"What do you mean by that? I am not asking out of idle curiosity, dear," he went on, drawing a little nearer to her side. "I can't help taking an interest in you, you know; I like you so much. If you had any trouble of that kind on your mind and would let me help you, if I could, it would be a satisfaction to me." It had already been a satisfaction to him to hear that she had disclaimed the idea.

"Why should you think that I had? It is very kind of you to care, though. You would not call a little boy-and-girl nonsense that happened when I was too young to understand, and when the other person was just as silly and not much older than myself, a love affair, would you?"

"Well, no, I suppose not. But it would all depend on whether either of the parties to it had kept it up in any sense. Is there anything of the kind in your case; are you bound in any way, or do you fancy yourself to be so?"

"Oh no, surely not." There was an amount of passion in her tone that took him by surprise and interested him at once. He had kept out of this sort of thing since he had grown to man's estate, and though he intended to marry some day, he had no desire to do so at present, so Milly's sisterly unconsciousness had

supplied the slight natural desire he had felt for a woman's company in a most satisfactory way. She had never tried to attract him, and he had imagined her life to have been a blank page. If she had not been a relative he recognized the fact that she would have made him a very suitable wife, but he had a strong dislike to consanguineous marriages, and having much self-restraint and no temptations, he had not as yet, at all events, fallen in love with her, as Jack Mowbray suggested he ought to have done.

Just then the luncheon bell rang ; both of them had begun to be aware that their demeanour to each other had been disturbed a little from its usual propriety, and both were glad of the distraction, but though he made no more attempts that day to resume the conversation with his cousin, he determined that at some future time he would try once more to gain her confidence. It was a duty he owed to the girl, as one of her few remaining relatives, to help her in any difficulty while she lived under his own roof.

The days passed on as usual ; Captain Upton was sent for to see a friend who had been taken ill suddenly in Naples. He did not care much for the man, but could never refuse to do a kindness, and as he sat and watched by the sick bed he found himself constantly thinking of Milly's sweet, rather sad face, and wondering as before what had brought the cloud over it which he had lately noticed. His friend died and he remained to bury him and to settle his affairs, and more than a month had passed since his conversation with Milly on the terrace when he returned to Santa Croce one afternoon in April. He had not given notice of his coming, and after going into his mother's apartments to greet her, ran upstairs to find his cousin. He had certainly missed her very much indeed.

She was not in the drawing-room or on the terrace, and her maid, they told him, had gone for a walk. He had never been in the habit of going into the little morning-room which specially belonged to her, but a slight impatience which he did not care to restrain possessed him just then, and he walked along the terrace and looked into her window to see if she were there. She was sitting in a corner of the couch, her head buried in the cushions, sobbing bitterly, as if her heart would break.

Poor child ! Then there was something wrong ; he would try to make her confess that very night. After dinner he always sat

with her awhile, generally reading aloud or getting her to sing to him ; this must not be allowed to go on, and he stole quietly away to his own quarters.

They met at dinner as usual ; Milly was very pale and her eyes, which she scarcely raised, told tales, but she looked so sweet and fair and womanly that the man's heart stirred within him, and he knew that a change was coming into his life. He had fallen in love or was on the brink of it.

She stayed in the drawing-room for a few minutes after the meal was finished, and then remarking that she had letters to write, said she would bid him good-night. But an imperative desire to have it out with her had arisen in his mind, and instead of acquiescing quietly, as he would have done a few short weeks ago, he kept her hand in his.

"I think it is very unkind of you to leave me to myself on the first evening of my return, Milly," he said, still holding her. "It chills a man, you know, to find he isn't wanted when he gets back after a good long absence."

"Don't say that, Charley," she answered gravely. "I am very glad indeed to have you again. I will stay, of course, if you wish it."

"I do wish it. Let me put your shawl on for you and then come out into the garden. The moon is out and the air is soft and lovely."

He held out his arm, and though she hesitated a moment, she took it and they began to pace up and down the terrace together, talking of indifferent things. Then they were silent for awhile ; he led her to the parapet and they stood looking down on the sea ; the moon was casting silver gleams across it.

"Milly," he said at last, "you trust me, I think."

"Of course I do."

"Then will you tell me why you were crying so this afternoon when I came to your window ? I am a great deal older than you, dear, and I might be able to help you if I knew what your trouble was, for I am now certain that you have one."

He felt the hand on his arm tremble a little ; he laid his own on it and held it in a firm grasp. Something in the touch of the strong fingers seemed to give the girl courage and she turned to him suddenly.

"Charley, you are right ; I have a great trouble, and I should

like to tell it you, for there is nobody else in the world that I trust as I do you, and your mother is not strong enough to be worried. But first will you promise me never to mention it to any living soul?"

He considered a moment. To give such a promise might not be to her interest.

"I think you had better leave that to my own judgment," he said. "I am very fond of you; I have only quite lately found it out, and you may trust me to do nothing that would injure you."

She stood close to him in silence for a few minutes, then he heard a low whisper:

"I am married, Charley; at least, I am afraid so."

He started violently, and then thinking he could not have heard aright, said gravely:

"My dear child, do you know what you are saying?"

"Yes, only too well;" and then her frame was shaken by sobs once more. He put out his arm instinctively to support her; she never needed it more, he thought. After awhile she became more composed and he led her to a seat, placed himself by her side, and still holding her trembling fingers in his own, said gently:

"Now try and explain yourself, Milly, for I think it is very evident I ought to hear more."

"I will tell you all, Charley," she answered, "only don't blame me more than you can help. You have heard, I think, that Mrs. Marsden, who brought me up, had a son."

"Yes."

"Well, we were playmates together, and one day—it was my sixteenth birthday, I remember—he brought me a present of a story-book. The subject of the book was some nonsense about an elopement and a Scotch marriage, and he begun to talk to me about it, and went on to say that he was very fond of me indeed and would like to marry me. I laughed at the whole thing and would not listen, but he stayed a fortnight with us and day after day the same subject seemed to be in his mind. Then he went back to Oxford, and came to us again at Christmas, and asked me if I would go through a Scotch marriage ceremony with him, as it would be useless to ask my guardian's consent to an engagement. If I would do this, he said he would come forward and claim me

when I was twenty-one, and we could be married properly in church. He brought a number of foolish novels, which I ought not to have been allowed to read, I know now, but at sixteen one has not learned to discriminate. I suppose it was as much the influence of these as his persuasions, but at last I began to think it would be very romantic to be engaged secretly, and I consented to that. One day when we were out together, he took me to a cottage in the next village, where a man and his wife who were strangers to me were living, and said that these people would bind us together in a way that would make it impossible for any one to separate us, and he showed me a ring which looked exactly like a wedding ring, but which he said I need not wear, as it was merely to be considered a sign of our engagement, but I was to be sure never to lose it. You understand that I was merely a silly baby, don't you, Charley, and that I had no idea that I was going to commit myself seriously?"

"Yes, child, yes." But oh, the pity of it, he thought; the pity of it. "How old was the fellow?"

"About nineteen or twenty, I think. Of course I was as much to blame as he, I suppose, and Mrs. Marsden let me do exactly as I liked, and trusted me, I am ashamed to say; it would have been better had she not done so. The end of it was that I consented to have the ring put on, and some questions were asked us, as to whether we would take each other as husband and wife, and these did frighten me a little at the time. Then I think I signed some paper which I did not read, but I thought so little of the affair that it almost passed from my memory, though I always had a feeling that once in my life I had been a very naughty girl indeed, and had deceived everybody, but I did not like to confess because Willie made me promise not to do so till he gave me permission." She paused here; her hand lay still in his.

"Did you see the fellow—the boy, I mean, after this?"

"Oh, yes, several times. Then about six months—or perhaps a year—after my guardian told Mrs. Marsden he thought Willie was getting too big to be seen walking about with me, and though he came once or twice to see his mother I never met him again. He went to Canada and is there still."

"Was he ever alone with you after this—this ceremony, or whatever it was?"

"Yes."

"Did he—did he attempt to treat you with more familiarity than he had done before? I must ask this, Milly, for you need a friend, and I cannot act for you unless I know all."

"Once. Only once."

"Tell me—that is, I suppose he tried to kiss you?"

"Yes."

"And put his arm round you and that sort of thing?"

"Oh, no, I was old enough to know better than to allow him to do that, although I had acted so foolishly. He took my hand and kissed me once—I did not know he meant to—but I never let him do it again."

"You are quite sure."

"Positive. And after he kissed me that once I had a sort of dislike to his company, and I never was alone with him again. Never once."

"Then he did not seem to consider himself married to you?"

"Not then. But—oh, Charley, how shall I tell you!"

"Go on, my dear; tell me all."

"Well, as I said, the matter almost passed from my mind; then as I grew older and read more I began to wonder if I really was married in a sort of fashion. I resolved never to see him again, in any case, and I made up my mind that it would be all right—no one would ever know, and I must take care not to fall in love, or let any one get to care for me, that would be all. But three months ago I had a letter from him, claiming me as his wife, and asking me to come over to Montreal and be married to him again in church. The very idea fills me with horror!"

"Why does he not show himself over here?"

"He has been very ill; some lung trouble or other and is not able to travel. He says it is my duty to come to him. And, Charley, I have been longing to tell you all this and to ask you to find out, if you can, if I am really married or not. I do not love him, of course, in the very least, but I must pay for my folly, I suppose, if what was done was legal. I cannot go to him, though, I think, unless you tell me that it is my duty. God help me! I am very miserable."

He put his arm about her and drew her close; he loved her, he knew it now, and he thought if this wretched business could be proved to be of no importance that she would turn to him, perhaps. Thank Heaven, she had known how to take care of

herself afterwards, at all events. After thinking carefully over the matter for some little time, he told her that he would himself go over to Montreal at once, see Marsden and get from him all particulars. He would then place the matter in his own lawyer's hands ; he was a trustworthy man and no one but himself should know what was being done, only Milly must give him full authority and must write a letter to Marsden stating that she could not consider herself to be his wife, nor had she any desire to become so. The hopefulness of his words gave her courage and she listened eagerly to his plans.

"There must eventually be some publicity, I fear," he said, "but you have nothing to be ashamed of. My mother need not know, and you, I think, have not any relatives but ourselves, have you ?"

"None that I know of, and except Mrs. Marsden, no friend ; merely a few acquaintances about whom I care little. No girl, I fancy, was ever kept so shut up as I was. But it will be very unpleasant for you. Perhaps I ought to go away. Mrs. Marsden would take me in ; she must of course be told."

"Yes, that would, I think, be desirable. But I shall not allow you to go away, Milly. You will stay here like a good girl and take care of my mother while I am absent. Then if I have nothing but bad news to bring you, you must still stay here, if possible, and I will help you to bear your trouble as well as I know how. If he has the right to call you wife, he will indeed be a brute if he attempts to force you to come and live with him when you tell him you have no desire to do so. It is so, dear, is it not ? You have no desire ?"

"Charley, I feel as if I would rather kill myself than go and live with him. I may have to do so, I suppose ; but I don't think I should live long under such a yoke. I liked him very well as a boy to play with, but now that I am old enough to know what marriage means, death seems to me to be preferable to such a union as that would be."

"Could you show me his letters ?"

"Yes, oh yes," she said rising. "I will go and fetch them ; there are but two." When she returned and gave them to him, she held out her hand to say good-night. He took it and looked into her eyes, now so full of sadness ; she met his glance and said in broken tones :

"Dear Charley, my kind good cousin, I shall always love you as if you were my own brother for your kindness to me to-night."

He bent forward and kissed her gently on the forehead, then as she was about to leave him he yielded to a sudden temptation and took her into his arms. "Milly," he said, "I can never be a brother to you. But if all goes well and this trouble turns out to have no real foundation—if we can find the fellow who did the trick, for I think he would hardly have dared to make it a legal union—I hope I may become something nearer and dearer." Then he let her go, and she rushed away to her own room.

Captain Upton knew nothing whatever of Scotch law, but he determined to consult those who did without any delay, and the very next day he started for London, intending to sail for Canada at once. He had taken the disease called love rather later than most men; the attack promised to be a severe one, and though he knew that he might never be allowed to call Milly his wife, he hoped all the same to be able to keep her at Santa Croce—a mad idea which he would have been the first to denounce in the abstract, had any one consulted him in a similar case.

Milly tried to hope against hope during his absence; each time the post came in she would look anxiously over the letters, for her cousin had promised that his lawyer should communicate with her as well as himself if he had any trace of the occupants of the cottage where the affair took place, for it appeared that they had left the neighbourhood directly afterwards. He wrote to her on his arrival in London, bidding her keep up her spirits and notifying his departure for Liverpool and Canada that very night. A fortnight passed away and then she received a telegram from him, stating that he had arrived in Montreal and had seen Marsden; the result of the interview he would send her by letter.

This was the hardest time of all; she waited in deep anxiety during the next fortnight and at last a thick packet arrived for her, addressed in her cousin's hand.

"Dear Milly," it ran, "I am writing this in the room below that which Marsden is occupying. His mother is with him, and I learn from her that she heard from her son for the first time about what you confided to me some three weeks ago. He is very ill, and the doctor who is attending him informs me that

he cannot live more than a few weeks. He is scarcely allowed to speak at all, but from the few words I have exchanged with him I learn that he evidently considers that you are man and wife, and declares that proof of this would be easy. I am sorry to say that he declines altogether to believe that his days are numbered, as his appearance and the verdict of more than one of the best medical men here proclaim to be the case, for I at once called in further advice on my own responsibility. He has, he says, laid the whole case before a competent legal adviser, and, as soon as he is able to do so, intends to resort to strong measures to compel you to come to him. But he never will be able to do so, and his state of health makes it impossible for me to speak to him as I should naturally do were he in a different position. I have, however, told him that as your nearest relative, I should take steps on my own account to have the matter properly sifted, should his life be prolonged. It seemed cruel to inform a dying man that it was all but impossible that the necessity for this would ever arise. His own account of the matter, which he wrote down for his mother's perusal, shows that he knew pretty well what he was doing when he entrapped you as he did, young as he was, and exonerates you completely, for he confesses that you were a most unwilling victim, but that he was determined to force you into consenting. He would have claimed you on your twenty-first birthday, but you had just started on your visit to us, and he thought it wiser to wait a year longer.

"Things being as they are, I think I can serve you best by waiting out here to see what happens; it appears to me to be unnecessary to take any further steps, when death may solve the problem at any moment."

Milly read the letter through in breathless excitement. When she came to the end of it she fell on her knees by her bedside. Was it wicked to be unable to feel sorrow at the death of a fellow-creature because he had injured her? She tried to keep back the relief at her heart; how heavy the burden had been she had scarcely known till now, when it was about to be lifted from her.

A month passed by. Captain Upton wrote from time to time, and then one morning a telegram arrived. The end had come, and he was to start the next day for home. Milly lay awake at night, listening to every breeze that blew. She dared now

to think of those words of his—"something nearer and dearer." She had never suspected till he uttered them that he regarded her in any other light than that of a favourite sister; for her own part, she had believed that the blight on her life must be a safeguard against any such weakness. Perhaps she had been mistaken.

She did not know when to expect her cousin; he had purposely refrained from telling her. One evening in May she was sitting alone in the garden under the terrace walls, enjoying the cool air—for summer had set in at Santa Croce, and but for the absence of the master of the house they would have already started northwards—when she heard steps in one of the rooms above. Had he come at last? How dared she go to meet him?

Presently her name was called from a window overhead; he was standing there watching her.

"Come up," he said, "and give me some dinner. I am very hungry after my long journey."

She rose at once, and in a few moments was standing by his side. He took both her hands and looked down into her eyes; they met his for an instant and then fell beneath his glance. Luigi, the man-servant, began to clatter the plates outside.

"After dinner is over we will have our talk, dear," he said, releasing her; and during the meal he told her of various incidents of his journey. He saw that she could not bear much just then.

"Bring the coffee outside on the terrace, Luigi," he said when the meal was over.

He had forced her to eat something, and her usual composure had returned to her. They strolled together for awhile among the flowers, speaking of everything but the subject nearest their hearts just then.

"You will be tired," he remarked at last. "Come up to the terrace again, and we will talk over our plans for the summer. We ought to be moving next week."

He led her up the steps, taking her hand in his as if she had been a child. They seated themselves in a favourite corner overlooking the sea.

"I want to go yachting again this year," he remarked. "You are a good sailor, I know."

"Yes," she replied. "But I thought your mother——"

She did not finish her sentence, for a strange thrill went through her as she was uttering the words, which seemed to make further speech impossible for the moment. He had thrown his arm along the back of the seat and his hand had touched her shoulder.

"Milly," he said at last, after a long silence, "will you try and forget this foolish affair which has made you so unhappy? The principal actor in it is no longer in this world; I saw him laid to rest with my own eyes. At the very last he sent for me, and asked me to tell you that he was sorry he had brought it all on you, and begged for your forgiveness. I took on myself to say that you would grant it, and the poor foolish fellow took comfort, I think. I knew you would be glad to hear this, and now I think we may consider the subject done with for ever; I should like you to promise me that you will put it out of your mind. Will you?"

"Yes," she answered. "How can I ever thank you for all you have done for me, Charley. I have said no word of gratitude, but I shall remember it all my life long."

He did not reply. Words were trembling on his lips which he was longing to utter; but he wanted some assurance first as to whether the girl loved him before doing so. He was not at all sure that she did, as yet. The moon was shining full on her face; he turned to look at her, but her eyes met his now with a calm, untroubled glance; the relief he had brought her had been so great, she could think of nothing else for the moment. But then he felt he could bear it no longer.

His arm stole round her and he tried to draw her close to him; she resisted for a moment and then suddenly yielded. He turned her face towards him and pressed his lips to hers. She put her hand timidly on his shoulder; then he knew.

"Will you be my wife, Milly?" were the words he whispered in her ear. The little hand which rested on his shoulder stole round his neck; no words would come, but he was answered all the same.

"I thought you considered it wrong for cousins to marry, Charley," she remarked about half-an-hour later, when they had come back to their senses once more.

"So I do: first cousins. I should not have thought of allowing you to fall in love with me if that had been the relationship

between us," he said audaciously. Then he took a ring out of his waistcoat-pocket and fitted it on her finger, remarking as he did so, that it would soon have to be replaced by another, as he meant to take her yachting with him that summer. "Jack Mowbray must be my best man," he continued. "How he will triumph over me when he hears that I have succumbed already ; it is only six months since he left us. He did not dare to say anything openly to me on the subject, but I could see that he considered that our duty lay plain before us, and marvelled in his own mind at our having evaded it so long."

They were married with all possible expedition that very summer. I spent one golden autumn with them not many years ago, and I came to the conclusion that they were the most satisfactory couple of my acquaintance. They had no child, but they were as happy as the day is long all the same.

Some two months ago, however, I saw an announcement in the *Times* which led me to suppose that that omission had been rectified at last by the appearance of a son and heir, and a subsequent letter from Captain Upton confirmed the fact.

"We have a splendid boy," he wrote, and I was very glad that it was so. It seemed a pity that that beautiful old place should pass into the hands of strangers. He loves it well, and now it will have for him an additional attraction.

Lady Milchester's Diamonds.

By RICHARD WARFIELD,

Author of "MRS. BARFIELD'S JEWELS," "A BURTON CRESCENT MYSTERY,"
etc.

CHAPTER I.

SHELDRAKE-ON-SEA is a quiet little town on the eastern coast of England. It is by no means a fashionable resort, nor as yet has the solitary railway company that runs trains for the benefit of those who may desire to visit it, seen fit to turn it into a watering place for the million. No, trips to Sheldrake are unknown, much to the gratification of the householders there, who are quite content with the harvest they reap from the staid, steady-going people who annually spend their summer holiday at it. In fact, the good folk of Sheldrake depend but little on strangers for their livings. There are sufficient moneyed, if not wealthy, people in the place to make it prosperous without adventitious or extraneous assistance.

Moreover, Sheldrake is a very conservative town, and, as such, treats all strangers with a certain amount of suspicion, especially if they show the least disposition to make their permanent home in the neighbourhood of its shingly beach.

You will understand, then, that when a new doctor, *i.e.*, a strange doctor, suddenly swooped down upon the inhabitants of Sheldrake, rented the best house on their esplanade, and announced his name and profession with a glittering brass plate on his door, "a plate," as somebody said, "as vulgar as a warming pan," excitement and indignation ran high. Curiosity, too, was not lacking.

"How is the fellow going to live?" demanded old Doctor Parsons crustily. "He'll be in the workhouse in six months."

"And we shall have to pay to help to keep him," groaned his friend and colleague, Doctor Rodgers, who hated disbursement of any kind.

"I call it impudence, his daring to come to oppose us," grumbled Doctor Parsons. "The idea of a nincompoop of whom nobody knows anything having the insolence to flaunt a door-plate in our faces!"

"He shall be punished," cried Rodgers in a menacing tone ; "I shall refuse to meet him in consultation."

"Capital !" chuckled his partner ; "I'll do the same—that will settle him."

Having thus satisfactorily arranged for the complete annihilation of the new-comer, the two old gentlemen sipped a glass of sherry apiece and toddled off home.

Meanwhile, Doctor Urmston, for so the stranger was named, sat in his consulting room and waited for patients. They were rather shy of coming ; Messrs. Parsons and Rodgers had tinkered at their constitutions so long that they were afraid to intrust them into other hands. When Doctor Urmston had been three months in the place not a single resident had been to him for advice ; the only money he had taken had been captured from members of the floating population. The old-established firm was correspondingly jubilant.

Let us take a look at Doctor Urmston, as, with folded arms, he sat before his fire one cold January morning. He was a tall, muscular man, with a well-knit, sinewy frame—a man in the prime of life. His eyes, large but piercing, were of a jetty blackness, his face decidedly handsome, but the thin, closely-compressed lips betokened temper. A shrewd observer could not fail to think that there was withal about the doctor somewhat of a cruel look.

"I have been here exactly three months," he mused, "and at present I have made no headway among these dolts. It is time there was a change. Yes ; I feel that a change is coming." Doctor Urmston was clearly of a sanguine nature.

A timid ring at the house-bell now attracted his attention. "I should not wonder," he said to himself, and he smiled grimly, "if that ring be the turning-point of my career in Sheldrake."

"A lady wishes to see you, sir," said a page-boy, entering the room.

"Let her wait ten minutes and then show her in, Thompson," replied the doctor. His heart began to beat rapidly, and he betrayed other signs of unusual excitement. "I'm as unnerved as the veriest child," he muttered, "and perhaps it is not the right woman after all."

The time passed slowly, but at length, with a tremendous flourish, Thompson ushered in the lady.

Doctor Urmston advanced to meet her and offered her a chair.

She came forward shyly and with a hesitating step. "Doctor Urmston, I believe?" she murmured, sinking into the proffered seat. Her voice was sweet and clear, and she gazed at the doctor with half-frightened eyes.

The doctor bowed.

"My brother," she continued, in more assured tones, "my brother is very ill, poor boy; I wish you to come to see him."

"What is his complaint?" asked the doctor.

"A weak spine. He has been getting gradually worse and worse for the last year. Nine months ago we came to reside in this town, hoping that the sea air might be of benefit to him, but our hopes were vain. He grows daily more of an invalid. Doctor Parsons and Doctor Rodgers have both attended him, but they have done him no good, and I thought I'd try you."

"I am much flattered," answered Doctor Urmston; "but have you informed the other doctors of your decision?"

"Oh! yes, and I don't think they liked it. 'You must fully understand, madam,' they said in a breath, and the speaker's face lighted up with a wan smile, the first since she had entered the room, 'you must fully understand that we most absolutely decline to meet Doctor Urmston in consultation.'"

"And your reply, madam?"

"I told them I could dispense with their services for the future."

"Then I shall have much pleasure in attending your brother."

"And oh! doctor," the lady exclaimed, as she rose to depart, "you will do your best for my dear brother, won't you? I sometimes fear I am to lose him altogether. You will save him if you can, will you not?"

"Rest assured, I will use my utmost skill."

On the very threshold of the room the lady turned again.

"What an unbusiness-like man you are, Doctor Urmston," she said severely, "you are allowing me to go away without inquiring my name or where I live. How can you possibly visit my brother unless you know his name and address?"

The doctor was profuse in his apologies, and, thus mollified, the lady went away, having first handed him her card, on which

was inscribed, Miss Blake, Seaview Cottage, West Cliff, Shel-drake-on Sea.

A pretty woman was Laura Blake, and so thought Doctor Urmston, as from the window he watched her figure flit down the esplanade. I say "flit" advisedly, for there was about her walk a light, sylph-like grace of movement, as charming as uncommon. The keen frosty air had given Miss Blake a higher colour than was usual to her and enhanced her beauty, and on her homeward way she was the unconscious recipient of many an envious feminine, and admiring masculine, glance.

Having reached and entered Seaview Cottage, which stood a little way out of the town, Miss Blake hastily threw aside her wraps in the hall and at once went to her brother.

"Did you think me long, Algy?" she asked, bending down to stroke the sick lad's hair. "Has Hannah been good to you while I was away? Yes! but it is not like having Laura, is it, dear?"

Algernon Blake was a pale, delicate-looking boy of twenty; his thin, drawn face was stamped with the hues of ill-health; and a habitual expression of peevishness, no doubt the fruit of suffering, added further to its disfigurement. At any time it is a trying ordeal to have to lie on one's back when one wishes to be up and about, and it must be doubly so at the very opening of life. This Laura Blake knew, and she bore her brother's fretfulness with exemplary patience, for she was much attached to him.

"When is the doctor coming?" Algy inquired, without deigning to reply to either her questions or caress.

"He'll be here shortly," his sister answered. "My poor Algy! I wish I could help you to bear your trouble."

Even while she spoke Doctor Urmston rang the bell. Having thoroughly overhauled his new patient, the doctor pronounced the case far from incurable. "Time and careful attention, my dear Miss Blake, may do wonders," he declared. "I have treated many people similarly afflicted, and I can recall to mind more than one instance of complete recovery, when the patient's condition has been far more serious than your brother's."

Laura Blake brightened wonderfully on hearing this.

"There! Algy, you need despair no more," she said. "You hear what the doctor thinks."

"The others did me no good," returned Algy wearily.

When Doctor Urmston left the house he went for a stroll on the sea-shore. His cruel mouth was wreathed by a triumphant smile. "Capital! Capital!" he muttered; "nothing could be better. Yes, Algy, my friend, we'll soon have you all right again. If only—gracious! I say, you——"

"Inspector McVeigh, at your service," cried the jolly-visaged individual with whom the doctor had so unceremoniously collided. "It strikes me we'd both have been better employed in looking where we were going. I hope you are not hurt, sir."

In a few minutes the two men were walking up and down, chatting like old acquaintances. The inspector was in a communicative mood. "No, sir," he returned, in answer to a remark of the doctor, as he lit a cigar that individual had given him, "I cannot say we have much crime down here. Most of our petty sessional work is what I may call public-house cases. We have a larceny job now and then, but there aren't many."

"It's a wonder the Milchester diamonds don't tempt some London cracksman," said the doctor carelessly; "I hear they are of great value."

"Oh! you've heard all about the Milchester jewels, have you, sir?" replied the inspector, bestowing a shrewd glance on his companion. "It is a pity people cannot hold their tongues."

"It is," the doctor assented; "a great pity. By the way, inspector, do you know anything of the people who live in Sea-view Cottage?"

"Not much, sir. They have not been here very long—getting on for a twelvemonth, I should think. But why do you ask, sir?"

"Oh! only because I was called in to-day to see a boy there. He's in a bad way, but I've no doubt I can cure him in time."

"I'm very glad to hear it, sir. My Katie—that's my daughter, sir—she's very much taken up with Miss Blake, and often spends an afternoon at the cottage. They got to know each other through both of them being Sunday school teachers."

"They seem to me to be superior sort of people," continued Doctor Urmston; "and the girl's very pretty."

"Yes, she's a decent-looking young woman," agreed the inspector; "and Sheldrake air must suit her, for she's picked up wonderfully while she has been here. How do you like our little town, sir?"

"First rate," answered the doctor, "though," he added with a laugh, "I should like it better if I could get more patients."

"I am pleased to hear you like the place, sir."

"I like it so well," Doctor Urmston pursued, "that I have written this morning to a young friend of mine in town, begging him to bring his wife down here. She's a delicate woman, and I fancy the Sheldrake air would do her no end of good. They can live with me. My house is big enough for two or three families."

"It's more like a barrack than a house," laughed the inspector. "Well, good morning, sir ; I must be going."

"Katie," Inspector McVeigh remarked, when, half-an-hour later, his daughter and he were discussing their midday meal, "Miss Blake has called in this new doctor to attend her brother. What will Parsons and Co. say to that ?"

Miss Katie McVeigh tossed her head. "They may say what they like, father ; Laura Blake has done quite rightly : they are a couple of old women."

"The young fellow's in a bad way, Doctor Urmston says."

"Yes, father, and poor Laura's a slave to him. He's lucky to have such a sister ; she's little less than an angel."

It was about a month after Doctor Urmston's first visit to Algernon Blake that Laura began to notice an alteration in her brother ; and when, as the days passed on, it became obvious to all who saw him that he was surely, if slowly, improving under his new treatment, her gladness of heart and thankfulness knew no bounds. Hitherto the prey of a settled melancholy, she now went singing about the house, blithe as a blackbird at mating-time. Nor did she forget to sing the praises of the new doctor, whose skill had wrought such a wonderful transformation in her brother. Far and near she proclaimed his worth, and the object of her encomiums speedily found a large increase in the numbers of his patients.

Now, it happened that Lady Milchester, the owner of the aforementioned jewels, was an old woman, who, crotchety on most points, was especially so in the matter of medical attendants. When, therefore, the trumpeting forth of Doctor Urmston's fame as a healer grew loud enough to invade the precincts of Milchester Towers, her ancestral home, she became keenly desirous of letting him try his power over her rheumatism. No

matter that the complaint was chronic and well-established ; no matter that she had an inward misgiving that nothing short of death would ever cure it, Doctor Urmston had become locally the fashion and Doctor Urmston should be summoned to Milchester Towers.

In pursuance of this object she said one morning, after an unusually late breakfast, to her companion and secretary, Ellen Drew :

"Nelly, my dear, write to Doctor Clarkson by this day's post"—Parsons and Rodgers had long been sent to the right-about by her ladyship as incompetent humbugs—"and inform him that I shall no longer require his services. Tell him, also, to send in his bill ; I'll pay him off and have done with him."

Ellen Drew sat down and wrote the letter.

"And now, Nelly," continued the old lady, when the final scratch of her companion's pen betokened that the missive was completed, "write to Doctor—bless me! what's the man's name?"

"Urmston," Miss Drew suggested.

"Yes, to be sure ; Urmston. Well, write to him and ask him to call during the day."

Silence again reigned for a few minutes. The companion finished the letter and sealed it.

"Shall I send it to Sheldrake at once?" she inquired.

"Yes, Nelly, do, there's a dear."

"If you please, your ladyship," said a servant, entering the room, "Miss McVeigh wishes to speak with your ladyship."

"What! Katie McVeigh? Show her in, then," replied Lady Milchester, who was personally acquainted with all the residents for miles around.

"Well, what is it, Katie?" asked the old lady when, a couple of minutes later, the inspector's daughter stood before her.

"Don't look so frightened, child! I shan't eat you up. There, sit down ; I declare you're quite flurried."

Katie McVeigh was certainly much excited. She sank into a chair and began to cry. "Oh! Lady Milchester," she sobbed hysterically, "such a dreadful thing has happened."

"The smelling-salts, Nelly, quick!" cried her ladyship briskly.

Under their soothing influence Katie gradually grew calmer ; and the first thing she did was to make a sudden dive into her

pocket and drag forth a crumpled envelope. Having accomplished this feat, she flung, rather than handed, the envelope to Lady Milchester, and again relapsed into hysterics.

"Goodness me! what's come to the girl?" exclaimed Lady Milchester, with some acerbity of tone. "Attend to her, will you, Nelly, while I try to learn what all this precious fuss is about. I always thought Katie a sensible young woman, but it appears I was wrong."

So saying her ladyship adjusted her binoculars, broke open the envelope, and slowly perused the contents. Her face paled slightly as she took in the meaning. Twice, three times, did she read the letter through before she spoke.

"Katie," she said at last, "don't forget to thank your father for his warning and to tell him I'll take care. And now, if you feel composed enough, let me know exactly what has occurred at Seaview Cottage."

The pith of Katie McVeigh's story was as follows: about two o'clock in the morning Miss Blake had been disturbed by a slight noise. On sitting up and listening she plainly heard whispering downstairs. Being a courageous girl, she slipped quietly out of bed, put on her dressing-gown, and went to investigate the cause of it. Two men were in the sitting-room, drinking Algy's invalid's port and smoking. Their backs were towards her and for a little while they did not notice her. One of them, however, happening to glance up, espied the reflection of her figure in the overmantel. With an oath he sprang to his feet, and seizing her, forced her into an easy-chair where his companion kept guard over her while he ransacked the room. In about half-an-hour they departed with all the booty they could find, leaving the terrified girl in a dead faint. So quietly and expeditiously had they done their work that Algy Blake slept peacefully through the night without waking. "And father says they forced an entrance through the scullery window," finished Katie. Having been regaled with wine and cake, Katie was about to depart, when Ellen Drew proposed that she should leave the note at Doctor Urmston's, as she would have to pass his house to reach home, and thus save sending a special messenger. She gladly acquiesced, being always pleased to do anything for Miss Drew, with whom she was a favourite. Thus it came to pass that shortly afterwards,

while looking out of his window, Doctor Urmston was much astonished to see Miss McVeigh ascending his front door-steps. His face became ashen, but, recovering himself by an effort, he was the self-possessed professional man when his servant entered the room with Katie's note. Two minutes later a broad smile of satisfaction beamed on his countenance, but it was not a pleasing smile; rather was it a wicked smile, such a smile as Satan may often give over the commission of an evil deed.

"Beyond my highest expectations," he muttered. "What a clever girl my Laura is! But," and his brow darkened, "I shall be glad when the farce is played out. I don't like those two being together so long in the cottage."

Some time after the last candle had been extinguished that night in her house, old Lady Milchester rose slowly from her bed, and groping her way to the jewel-chest, emptied its every drawer. "I'll put them," she said to herself, "I'll put them where it would take a very clever thief to find them."

Thus gratulating herself, she moved to a window and drew up the blind. At the same moment the moon burst forth from behind a cloud, and in its pale radiance the jewels flashed and scintillated in her ladyship's hand; flashed and scintillated on the dressing-table, where she had placed some of them when she raised the blind; flashed and scintillated as if they had veritably been endowed with actual life.

Half-an-hour afterwards the moonbeams crept—for she had forgotten to draw down the blind again—stealthily over Lady Milchester's face, showing up every wrinkle and seam, intensifying each pucker and crow's-foot, but she never woke. They crept too lightly for that.

In the same hour Laura Blake was tending her sick brother, for he was more than usually restless; Doctor Urmston was smoking a choice cheroot and felicitating himself on having obtained a footing in Milchester Towers; while Inspector McVeigh, tramping homeward to his well-earned rest, and pondering on the recent robbery at Seaview Cottage, exclaimed, as he drew within sight of the house which occupied his thoughts, "The poor lad must be worse to-night; I can see his sister's shadow moving on the blind."

CHAPTER II.

"It is quite evident," said Inspector McVeigh slowly, tapping his pipe on the corner of the fender to dislodge the ashes, "that something must be done. I am ashamed to show my face out of doors."

When the inspector had any knotty problem to solve, he always did so with the accompaniment of much tobacco, and on the present occasion the problem was very knotty indeed, so much so that three large pipefuls of latakia had left him exactly where he had started. In fact he was completely nonplussed. He laid down his pipe in disgust and thus addressed his daughter, who sat opposite to him, doing patchwork:

"I am not, as you well know, Katie, one of those men who say that all women are fools, and I have good reason to believe that you have more than your share of brains. Now, put that rubbish down a moment and listen to me: On the night of the third or early on the morning of the fourth of last March Seaview Cottage was broken into and robbed. From that date up to the present hour on the twenty-seventh of May there have been no fewer than nine successful burglaries in this town, all, without doubt, the work of the same hands. For reasons which it is unnecessary to go into, it is quite plain that the thieves live among us and that their booty is not carried far away. We have no strangers here now worth speaking of, and none of them has been here more than a week or two. I am quite baffled, Katie."

"You make a mistake, father; we have some strangers amongst us: Mr. and Mrs. Reginald Pellingham arrived in Sheldrake two days before Seaview Cottage was broken into."

"What? the young swell and his invalid wife, Doctor Urmston's friends? You are foolish to think of them, Katie. The doctor is sufficient guarantee for their respectability."

"Is he indeed?" rejoined Katie tartly; "and why should he be, pray? What does any one of us know about him or his career previously to his coming here except what he has told us himself? I should not be a bit surprised if he turned out to be a good-for-nothing. I can't bear the man."

"So I perceive, my dear," answered the inspector smoothly. "However, don't run your head against a brick wall for the sake

of gratifying a little spite. Still, there is some truth in what you say; I'll think it over."

And Inspector McVeigh relit his pipe and again plunged into thought.

When Katie McVeigh spoke slightly of Doctor Urmston and threw out dark hints against his character, she had no object in her mind save that of quietly venting a little ill-nature against a man for whom she had conceived a violent aversion. Not for a moment did she really suspect the doctor of being aught but what he professed to be; and ten minutes after her little outburst, she would have been much surprised could she have known that her hasty words had made any impression on her father. Katie was one of those people who are very strong in their likes and dislikes, and she had taken a great fancy to Laura Blake—a fancy which that young lady apparently reciprocated in her own quiet way—and was quite ready to view the world through Laura's spectacles. Now, after her first feelings of gratitude towards Doctor Urmston for the skill with which he had treated her brother had subsided, Miss Laura Blake began to find out—or, at least, she said she did, which comes to the same thing—that the doctor was not a nice man.

"I don't quite know, dear," she said vaguely to Katie, "what there is in the man that displeases me, but I am never really at ease in his presence. Algy, fortunately, does not share my sentiment of dislike. He and the doctor get on admirably."

"I am glad of that," replied Katie, "and I agree with you, Laura; there is certainly something repellent about Doctor Urmston."

"Not absolutely repellent, dear," corrected Miss Blake; "I did not say that."

"Well, perhaps not repellent," Katie hastened to say; "but something so——"

"Untamed," suggested Laura.

"That very word was on the tip of my tongue," Katie declared. And she believed that she spoke the truth.

Laura Blake smiled to herself. But it is very doubtful whether she would have been so self-complacent had she been aware that in consequence of their conversation Katie would make innuendoes about Doctor Urmston to her father. Perhaps Miss Blake really had an antipathy to the doctor. Who can say? Be that

as it may, however, whatever her object in decrying him had been, it most decidedly had not been her intention that Katie should raise doubts in Inspector McVeigh's mind concerning his integrity.

Though not disposed to attach much importance to his daughter's tirade against Doctor Urmston, the inspector did not let the matter pass entirely out of his memory, and an event shortly occurred which recalled it to his mind with redoubled force. That event was nothing less than the theft of the Milchester jewels. Old Lady Milchester was found bound and gagged one morning, and on being freed, related how she had seen her property abstracted from its hiding place and been powerless to prevent it. "No one but myself," she said, "knew where I kept my jewels. I had not told a soul." And then she went on to relate how, warned by a letter from Inspector McVeigh to guard her gems with especial care, she had secreted them behind a sliding panel in her bed-room.

"And do you say that the burglars made straight for their concealment?" demanded the inspector.

"Yes," returned the old lady, "two of them stayed by me and two of them went directly to the panel and drew it back, though how they knew where to look remains a mystery. I am sure I had mentioned the matter to nobody."

Having gleaned all the information he could, which practically amounted to nothing, Mr. McVeigh proceeded to his own home, and after giving Katie instructions that he was on no account to be disturbed, he filled his favourite meerschaum and sat down to cogitate on the latest outrage. After two hours' deliberation he arrived at the following conclusion: "I have unsuccessfully tried my own ways; I will now try Katie's, and turn my attention to Doctor Urmston. Women can sometimes see further than men, if they *are* guided by instinct instead of reason. I don't believe he's a fraud, but still I remember he seemed to know all about the Milchester jewels the first time I met him."

Within a few days the inspector had learnt all that was known about the doctor. Before going into practice at Sheldrake, he had been in London for two years, where he had not been very successful. Thither he had come from America, being (he stated) by birth a citizen of New York. That was all.

"The information is valueless," mused the inspector ; " he has told us as much himself."

It goes without saying that the constant succession of undetected crimes in their midst excited in no small degree the wrath of the Sheldrakers.

Against the police they were absolutely furious, and Inspector McVeigh came in for the greatest share of vituperation. Week by week the *Sheldrake Gazette* hurled its invectives at his head, and fulminated in no measured terms over his crass stupidity ; and the poor man, who was, professionally speaking, endued with the thinnest of skins, writhed beneath its repeated onslaughts. He felt that he was hardly treated, though he did not wonder at the bitterness of his foes. Could they, he asked himself, could they have done more in his place ? It was just when he was almost on the verge of despair, and seriously thinking of resigning his post, that the thieves—for there were several of them—dropped like ripe plums into his eager hands. By one of those chances which are apt to be called "flukes," though they are clearly designed by the hand of Providence, the whole gang fell into his clutches at one *coup*.

"Katie, my dear," said Laura Blake, chancing to meet the inspector's daughter, in High Street, one sunny afternoon, "Mrs. Pellingham is coming to have tea with Algy and me to-night. Will you come also ? Algy is always so cheerful when you are with us."

Katie promised to go, and after a few commonplaces the girls parted.

Mrs. Reginald Pellingham was a big flaxen-haired doll of a Dresden china type of beauty. Her health, she declared, was wretched, but it would have been hard to say exactly what ailed her. Perhaps, like Mrs. Wittiterly, her soul was too large for her body. Be that as it might, however, she was a very pleasant person with whom to spend an evening, and Katie McVeigh took to her at once.

It had been one of Algy's best days ; he had, for the first time since he came to Sheldrake, been able to sit up, propped with soft pillows, for an hour or two. Laura was consequently in unusually gay spirits, and the quartette gathered around the tea-table was a very merry one.

"I declare," Mrs. Pellingham exclaimed, with a silvery laugh,

"I have not felt so well for months as I do this evening. What a wonderful place this Sheldrake of yours is, Miss McVeigh. It is fast curing Al—Mr. Blake, and has worked wonders for poor me. I've a great mind to persuade Redge to take a house here."

"What! and leave the doctor alone again? Fie! Mrs. Pellingham," Laura responded. "No doubt he's had quite as much to do with your recovery as the Sheldrake air. It would be cruel to desert him."

"Yes, indeed it would, Mrs. Pellingham," chimed in Katie, anxious to back up Laura.

And thus they talked away—airy, inconsequent chatter, valueless as harmless.

Presently Mrs. Pellingham stretched out her hand, blazing with jewels, for another slice of bread and butter.

"What pretty rings you are wearing," said Katie. "May I look at them after tea? One is just like——"

Katie's sentence came to an abrupt close, for happening to look at her hostess for an endorsement of her admiring sentiments, she was struck with terror by the aspect of that young lady's face. It was of a sickly, ashen hue, and the eye-balls were distended as if in horror.

"Laura! Laura! What is the matter?" she cried.

For answer, Laura Blake uttered a fearful cry, and springing suddenly up, overthrowing the tea-table in her course, with one hand pressed tightly over her heart, she staggered a few paces across the room and sank on to the floor in a dead faint.

The scene that ensued was one of indescribable confusion: Algy Blake tried to rise and go to his sister's assistance, but, after several futile efforts, fell back on his couch with a low moan; Katie, the first shock of astonishment over, flew to her friend's side and raised her head; while Mrs. Pellingham, drenched with scalding tea from head to foot, lay under the table amid the *débris* of the meal, in a fit of violent hysterics.

Finding her attempts to restore animation to Laura to be vain, Katie rang the bell, but no servant coming in reply (as a matter of fact the Blakes' one domestic was stone deaf), she placed a cushion under her friend's head and set about rescuing Mrs. Pellingham from her unenviable position. And a nice plight that lady was in. Katie could barely keep back her laughter.

Laura Blake now heaved a faint sigh, and Mrs. Pellingham

being by this time somewhat recovered, though still in a flabby condition, Katie despatched her for Doctor Urmston. She (Mrs. Pellingham) brisked up wonderfully on this ; announced, in fact, that she felt quite well again, and ran off with what Katie thought surprising rapidity.

Meanwhile, Doctor Urmston and Reginald Pellingham were having a quiet confabulation over their after-dinner coffee and pipes—for the doctor invariably dined late.

"We've been uncommonly lucky, Redge, my boy," said the doctor cheerfully, "but I think we'd better dry up now and make a move. Upon my word, Algy and Laura are a clever couple. That weak back of Algy's has been a trump card."

"How did he blind these doctors at Sheldrake?" inquired Mr. Pellingham. "It would be difficult work, I expect."

"Not at all," laughed the other ; "the easiest thing in the world. They are both about as ignorant of their own profession as it is possible for two men to be ; and as they did not understand Algy's complaint—and I am not surprised at that," with a grim smile—"they imagined it to be some obscure and little-known disease with which they were unacquainted. They consequently looked very wise, and kept their thoughts to themselves."

"Wherein they showed their wisdom," rejoined Pellingham. "But, I say, doctor, it must have been awfully trying for Algy, that lying all day on his back."

"Of course, it was," assented the doctor, "but that was not half as bad as the drug-taking to give him the required appearance of ill-health. I tell you, Redge, that boy's taken enough poison to murder a townful of people. I don't believe his constitution will ever get over it. My heart's almost failed me sometimes when I've seen his poor haggard face. He's a resolute chap or he would never have gone through with it."

The two men puffed away at their pipes in silence for some time ; then the younger burst into a loud laugh.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "it was a grand idea of Laura's to make a bosom friend of old McVeigh's daughter. You ought to be proud of your girl, doctor."

"So I am, Redge," agreed his companion ; "but Algy's every bit as smart as she. You ought to be equally proud of your brother. They're a splendid pair."

Silence again reigned, and this time was broken by a long peal at the house bell.

"Bother it!" muttered Doctor Urmston. "I hope I have not to go out again this evening."

In a minute the room door was flung open and in rushed Mrs. Pellingham. The men jumped up and gazed at her in alarm.

"Never mind me; I'm all right," she gasped, "but go—go to Laura, doctor. She's dying of heart disease."

The words were accompanied with a lot of pantomimic gesture.

Doctor Urmston and his friend hastened away to Seaview Cottage, leaving Mrs. Pellingham to change her wet garments. Having done so, she drew all the rings off her fingers and locked them up.

"What a blundering fool I've been," she told herself. "Redge will be fit to murder me when he comes back, and I dread to meet the doctor."

And the thought of her husband's and her host's anger made Mrs. Pellingham quake with fear. Nor was she afraid without cause: Mr. Pellingham returned home in a towering passion.

"You incomparable idiot!" he cried wrathfully, striding to where she sat cowering in an easy-chair. "What do you mean by playing the fool like this? I've a great mind to——" and he raised his clenched fist.

"Oh! don't, Redge, don't hit me!" she pleaded, shrinking backward. "Forgive me, Redge; forgive me."

Reginald Pellingham was a bad man, but he was neither a coward nor a brute; he was, moreover, greatly attached to his wife. His arm fell to his side and he stared at her in moody silence.

"I believe you wish to ruin me, Ella," he said at last.

The woman fell at his feet, sobbing, and clasping his right hand, smothered it with kisses. "Don't say that, Redge; don't say that. It is cruel of you. Am I not daily selling my very soul at your bidding?"

He gently stroked her hair. She knew she was forgiven, and went on:

"Redge, my darling, why not be as we used to be before we met this wretched Doctor Urmston? We were happy enough then, if we were poor. What better are we for our ill-gotten wealth? It goes as fast as it comes, and we never know a moment's peace."

"You talk like a foolish child, Ella."

"No, Redge," she answered, with great earnestness; "I speak what I know to be the truth."

We must now, however, return to Katie McVeigh. Having left Laura Blake safely in Doctor Urmston's hands, she went home in a state of no little perturbation. She was, in truth, greatly flustered.

"What! back already, Katie?" asked her father in much surprise. "Why, I did not look for your coming for another couple of hours."

Then Katie related what had taken place. Inspector McVeigh listened in silence until his daughter had done; then he took a long pull at his meerschaum.

"What made you wish to examine Mrs. Pellingham's rings?" he inquired. "Was there anything striking about them?"

"Nothing particular, father," replied the girl; "but one was just like a ring Lady Milchester used to wear, and I thought I should like to see it closer."

"Oh! that was all, was it?" commented the inspector, laying down his pipe and rising and putting on his hat. "Well, I think I'll go for a stroll before turning in. You need not sit up for me, Katie."

And not long after Katie McVeigh went to bed and slept the sleep of the righteous.

The sun was shining brightly into her room on the following morning, when the inspector's daughter was awakened by hearing her father in the kitchen below, talking in loud and jubilant tones. She sprang out of bed, and, hastily dressing, ran downstairs.

The kitchen was full of police, in the midst of whom stood her father, with a face beaming with delight.

"Good morning, my lass," cried McVeigh. "Here, men, have another drink all round to my daughter's health. Katie, my dear, you shall have the handsomest silk dress that money can buy. Ah! you may well look amazed, child," he continued, noting her perplexed expression, "but I have good news for you. We have captured the thieves who have been troubling us so long, and have got back Lady Milchester's jewels."

"And all through you, Miss Katie," said one of the men.

"Through me?" the girl ejaculated.

"Yes, through you," returned her father. "Are you not curious to learn who are the thieves?"

"They're no people that I know, are they, father?"

"You know them pretty well, I think," laughed the inspector. "Let me see," running his eyes over a piece of paper in his hand, "there's Miss Laura Blake and her invalid brother—and he's no more an invalid than I am—they're great pals of yours, aren't they?"

"You're joking, surely, father," said Katie, turning pale.

"Then," pursued the inspector, "there's Doctor Urmston and Mr. and Mrs. Reginald Pellingham."

Yes; the thieves were trapped at last, thanks to the vanity of one of their number. Had Mrs. Pellingham forborne to wear Lady Milchester's ring until she had left Sheldrake behind her, they would in all probability have gone scot-free. Laura Blake's ruse of upsetting the table to distract Katie's attention from the ring, and subsequent fainting-fit, were very clever impromptus and thoroughly deceived the inspector's daughter; but Katie's father was not so easily blinded, and, on hearing his daughter's tale, promptly obtained search warrants.

Much amusement was caused at the trial of the prisoners—Mrs. Pellingham turned Queen's evidence and divulged the whole plot—by Inspector McVeigh relating how assiduously Laura Blake waited on Algy while the search of the house was being carried on.

"Please don't make more noise than you can help," she had said. "My brother is very bad to-night. Yes, Algy darling, I am coming." And she had tended him devotedly.

But when it was suggested that "Algy darling" should be moved, so that the bed and mattress on which he lay might undergo an examination, and she found that pleading, and prayers, and tears were without avail, she became a veritable wild-cat and raved like a mad woman. And no wonder; securely packed in the centre of poor Algy's flock mattress were the Milchester jewels. Only a ring, the one Mrs. Pellingham had worn, was missing.

The doctor, who was proved beyond doubt to be a fully qualified medical man, was regarded by the judge as the ringleader of the gang, and, accordingly, ten years' penal servitude was meted out to him; Laura Blake got five; while Algy and Redge each

received a sentence of eighteen months' hard labour. Mrs. Pellingham had, of course, a free pardon.

Old Lady Milchester was so overjoyed on again receiving her jewels that she took Ella Pellingham under her special protection, and has promised to give her a sum of money, when Reginald comes out of prison, to make them a fresh start where the story of their crime is unknown.

"But tell me," said the old lady, "tell me how you knew where I had secured my jewels."

"Why, Algy Blake was reconnoitring from the big sycamore tree just outside your window, and the moon shone fully upon you. Don't you remember that you hid them by moonlight?"

The inhabitants of Sheldrake presented Inspector McVeigh with a handsome testimonial, "for," said they, "he is to be excused for not suspecting a fashionable doctor and an apparently helpless cripple of being burglars in disguise."

Never, perhaps, was a plot of wholesale robbery better arranged; Laura Blake's praise of the doctor procured him an entrance into the best houses, and his practised eyes soon noted where the valuables were kept.

However, "all's well that ends well," and nobody was dissatisfied with the turn things had taken except the firm of Parsons and Rodgers. The principals of it grumbled exceedingly, for though they rejoiced mightily in the overthrow of their successful rival, they did not like to be called "doddering old idiots," an epithet which was applied to them pretty frequently; and many sarcastic references were made in their presence to Algy Blake's weak back.

For this they revenged themselves by declining to subscribe to the inspector's testimonial. And I think that they are so well liked in Sheldrake that a clever young doctor would find a good opening there. But, mind you, his character must be unimpeachable and bear the most searching investigation. The good folk of Sheldrake have had a lesson.

Mr. Alington's Retirement.

TWO years ago, when Mr. Henry Alington, of the Bengal Civil Service, took his modest pension and retired as a comparatively young man, his case supplied a text on which well-intending seniors preached a good many homilies to junior members of the service. Some of his own contemporaries also and others found in it a not unwelcome sanction for the dislike and perhaps distrust which they in common with many Anglo-Indians felt for officials of exclusive and unsociable habits. For though he resigned his appointment Alington had had little choice of doing otherwise. The black mark was against his name ; his career, which seemed to be moving steadily to a brilliant consummation, had been suddenly marred. After he had been nominated to take charge of the important district of Chahpore, the appointment was with much abruptness cancelled, on the ground, as it leaked out, that he was discovered to be heavily indebted to a native banker and contractor of the locality. It was undesirable to give room for even suspicion that influence could be brought to bear on the administration. Though it had not been shown that his debts arose from participation in the great mining boom which had recently collapsed, there was too much reason to conclude that they did. The rule which prohibits civil servants from speculation needed vindication, and the authorities were determined not to trifle with its infraction. The circumstances did not warrant his immediate compulsory retirement, but official views were clearly shown in his appointment to a pestilential region among the islands in the delta of the river. Here, discharging duties usually intrusted to officers junior to himself, he remained for three years, traversing endless waterways in the boat which was his dwelling, and rarely meeting a European. At the first possible moment, knowing that the door of promotion was definitely shut against him, he applied to retire on his pension and his career in India closed.

There was, as has been said, plenty of moralizing on the subject. Sentimental people talked of the vulgarity of the

temptation to which he succumbed, and of the singular promise of distinction which had been cut off. But the case was always regarded as a simple one. All the same it was not quite so simple as it seemed. Hear the story.

From his first European furlough he brought back a wife with whom he had fallen in love while still at his crammer's. The station to which he was sent on his return lay in one of those remote planting districts, where not only is there no available society, but where no effort or expense can materially vary the monotony. It suited Alington excellently. The absence of distractions produced the leisure which enabled him to portion out his day between official and other intellectual work. His bachelor habits, that is to say, were in great measure continued, for he was by inclination a student, he was ambitious of distinction in the service, and what is usually called recreation attracted him seldom. Thus it was that their married life from its commencement came to take on, as its apparently natural state, the condition of being quiet and home-staying. When after four years they moved to another district, certain differences in their dispositions finding for the first time room to exert themselves, ran somewhat violently into collision. The new station was an up-country town famous for its annual race meet. It was a kind of secondary administrative centre where a considerable number of civil officials were collected; military cantonments were close by, and something in the way of entertainment was going forward every day. Alington assumed without question that their life here would go on as it had begun. By this time they had a boy. It seemed more than ever desirable to devote himself to professional advancement, and with this object his intention was that they should practically seclude themselves, restricting as far as was possible their appearances at public or private gatherings to those occasions when his official position made his attendance necessary. That was the husband's view. Will you now judge how the sort of life at which he aimed was likely to satisfy the wife? Julia had been brought up in one of the families where the female members regard their social duties as the primary occupation to which their time is to be devoted. Do you think it natural that she should be very content with solitary afternoons and evenings of domestic dullness? In a well-to-do household she had been the specially

spoilt child. Was it probable that she would quietly forego enjoyment when it was ready to her hand? Possibly you may say that many a woman under such circumstances has foregone her own desires. Yes, but poor Julia was not one of those. She had no power to forego anything that she liked even if she wished to try; and she was far from wishing to try. How she had endured the dreary years in their lonely bungalow she never well understood. There had been constant complaining, but complaint could not procure diversion where no means for it existed. Here, however, all was different. That constant round of pleasure which she used to suppose made the life of Englishwomen in India was in actual movement about her. And she was expected to shun it! Some passionate scenes between the two occurred and recurred. Alington stood out for the absolutely quiet life. He would not give way and fancied himself strong for not doing so. His own aims, you see, were meritorious, and there are men to whom that argument seems strong enough to overbear everything else. Julia, on the other hand, conscious that she meant no harm, claimed the right to share the life that others of her position led. After a period of conflict a kind of compromise gradually established itself. Alington stayed in the house working, and his wife went into society alone. He used to warn her angrily, reproaching her with neglect of the child, whom she left wholly to her European maid. But scolding did not make her love her home the more. Her passion for going out was suffered to grow by the consciousness that all cause for restraint was practically removed. There was no necessity that this should lead to a catastrophe. But unhappily it did. Eight or nine years after their married life began it ended.

Of how Julia spent the next year or two it is not well to speak. The case was tried in England, and there, after an interval, she married again. It was another Indian official whom she married, a rather smart young man, said to be fond of horses and a little extravagant, and a year or two junior to herself.

It was a relief to Alington when this occurred. He had, till then, been careful to keep himself informed of the path she was following. Let us hope that this anxiety was a sign of recognition on his side that he was in some measure answerable for what had befallen her—that he had not done his part by Julia.

He had, indeed, been miserably weak. A man may not renounce, as he had tried to do, his responsibility for his wife. In allowing her to be constantly alone in public places he had made the way of evil easier for her. Wrapped in his own virtue he had stood aside and let her go. As a matter of fact something which occurred afterwards showed that he did realize this, that he was conscious that at least he might have attempted more. Still it was now too late to do anything, and he quieted himself with the reflection that nothing could have averted the catastrophe. However strongly he had acted, the result, he told himself, must have been the same. In our troubles, we often comfort ourselves much as we comfort our friends in theirs, by the use of well-sounding phrases without being too sure of their truth. Anyhow, Alington could be certain of one thing, the great wrong that had been done to himself, and if he had been guilty of shortcomings perhaps he felt that he had also paid for them.

Men of reserved habits, when anything occurs that embitters their lives, do not as a rule become less reserved. They usually retire more than ever within themselves. That is what Alington did. His duty placed him in some measure in contact with other men ; but such time as was not needed for official work he spent alone in somewhat less rigid labour, which was his form of diversion. Several of his printed papers attracted attention ; once or twice he was consulted by members of council, and from time to time was employed in special ways. His reports, if long, had more than customary value. In the ordinary official routine so much energy was often found to be an inconvenience and in earlier days had drawn down more than one rebuke. But this could not happen now. He was becoming recognized as an authority on certain questions and no more snubs came his way. In departmental affairs even men of active brain must under some circumstances be tolerated.

In 1890-1891 a strange fever raged in Bengal. It was the gold fever. One spot where evidence existed of ancient workings was exploited, a syndicate acquired it, and after some operations sold it to a new company. The shares ran to a premium, and at once the presidency blazed with speculation. Every tract of barren land in Chota Nagpore became a trap for catching money if it produced none, and fresh companies sprang daily into life. The infatuation spared no class, or creed, or race.

While the tide of rising prices flowed, all seemed to go well. Every man's credit sufficed to borrow on gold shares and hundreds did borrow. But after the full tide came the ebb. At the highest figures what was known as the public bought the shares. After the public has been so fortunate as to acquire large amounts of any security, its market value often declines rather suddenly. Quotations ceased to rise, gold shares for a day or two were described as heavy, and then prices fell like a boulder on a mountain slope. Money-lenders, alarmed for their security, called up loans, and in a trice the unwonted speculator, whirled off his feet, found himself spinning in the eddies of distress. The government, not without cause, became anxious about its own servants. A little dabbling was unimportant, but if any officer in charge of funds had been in a hurry to be rich a sudden fall in values might produce the circumstances that can make temptation overpoweringly strong. It seemed wise by a show of activity to oppose the maximum of difficulty to the commission of irregularities, and a certain amount of extra inspection was decided on. Alington's services being available, part of the duty was confided to him.

He had visited several stations and only Bajgunge remained. There were reasons why this place stood over to the last. The ostensible one was that a cousin of his, a clergyman quartered there, was temporarily absent, and if a little delay were given might return in time to receive him. There was a stronger reason. We sometimes defer disagreeable things hoping that chance may avert them wholly. Mr. Macintosh, the officer whose accounts would be inspected at Bajgunge, Alington had never met. But he happened to be Julia's husband.

When in the middle of a broiling day Alington arrived at his cousin's bungalow the servant said the padre sahib would not be at home till dinner-time. He had a bath and breakfast and went to the government office. His meeting with Macintosh was necessarily unpleasant, and not less so that his coming was unexpected. The rest of the day was spent at the safe or over ledgers and papers. On returning to dinner he had some books brought to the house. Some links of proof had to be traced out, but he knew well enough that he had discovered a clever trick whereby the accounts were falsified by over 30,000 rupees.

"A nice pair," he said to himself as he dressed for dinner

There was satisfaction in making this discovery. Did it not confirm his theory that Julia had that leaning to evil which nothing which he could have done would have diverted? Did it not prove that he himself was in no way responsible for the trouble that had fallen on her? No longer very young and not in want, she had cast in her lot with a man capable of theft. He was good-looking, probably showy, and what did a little dishonesty matter? The chain of ideas does not perhaps strike you as very logical. No, but it was logical enough for a man to reassure himself with. "She knew what sort of a fellow he was. A nice pair," he said again.

Let us be quite clear as to what was impending. Defalcating officials may not be criminally prosecuted, but after expulsion from the service which they have disgraced, they are unlikely to lead creditable careers. Most commonly they cannot be expelled from the service. Before any action can be taken, they place themselves beyond the reach of human orders and the operation of the Queen's pleasure, and a kindly jury with a few customary words draws, as it were, a decent curtain round them to keep off eyes that would look too closely. In either case have you any doubt as to what in this instance would become of the wretched wife? In disgraced poverty, or with disgraced widowhood added, was a passionate, pleasure-loving creature, such as she, likely to keep to that strait path which the sober and careful so often miss? Julia had no strength to face need or self-denial of any sort. She was still handsome and bright. Whatever were the husband's fate the position would place her in temptations that she had no power to resist. For a time she had been living respectably, but when the exposure was made it was not to be doubted what it would bring about. It would for a certainty complete her moral ruin.

But it was already complete, Alington tried to argue; complete in fact if not in appearance.

"A nice pair," he said again.

The cousins had had dinner and, after their talk and cheroots, were going to their rooms. Alington had said good-night and then, as if by an afterthought, he added:

"Oh, by the way, Frank, I ought to ask. How is she going on? You know."

Frank could not have guessed that what he was going to say

would stab his cousin like a dagger. The main incidents of that married life which ended so sadly were known in the family, but very little beyond those incidents. The cleric spoke in an acquired and rather intoned voice, he kept his chin protruded in a manner that laymen seldom adopt, and he had a habit of constantly attributing occurrences to the direct action of the divine government. Such things usually irritated Alington. Just now he did not notice them.

"I'm glad you asked, old man," Frank said. "I did not like to mention her. I know little of her personally, but from what I hear, things are going on perhaps better than you could have hoped."

"And the man?" Alington said rather disdainfully. In all relations of life Macintosh, he thought, must be a contemptible creature.

"Oh, he takes very good care of her."

Alington had not expected such a reply. He would rather not have gone on with the subject, and remained silent, looking at the ground.

Frank misinterpreted this silence. He fancied that his cousin, moved by being so near the woman he had once loved, shrank from avowing that she had still any interest for him.

"I think your anxiety for her so noble," he said. "I can really reassure you. She's in good hands. They say Macintosh thought her a widow when he married, but at any rate now though of course she is not received quite as other ladies are, he sticks to her splendidly. He is always with her wherever she goes. And then, you know, there is no doubt his character is full of force. I don't mean that he is very lofty in his aims. I'm afraid he is not—but he is resolute and self-willed. He seems very kind to her, but his good sense tells him what is best for her, and somehow he takes care that it is done. For instance, I was told no longer ago than yesterday that she only keeps an ayah, yet her two children are excellently looked after. She does an immense amount for them herself. I know, of course, what sort of woman she is; but depend on it, she is growing better and gaining control over herself. If Macintosh is spared and she can continue to look up to him she will in time become a different creature. It's just a chance, a grand chance the Lord is giving her. Harry, my dear fellow, I am so thankful to be able to tell

you this. I see how you feel. I can't tell you how I honour you for it. Everything, you see, is worked for the best. By God's grace she has been once more rescued from temptation, and this man may be the saving of her."

We will not speculate as to the thoughts that occupied Alington's mind through that long close night, as he lay sleepless under the punkah. The next morning he appeared rather early at the office, but Macintosh, pale though composed, was already in his room.

"There is something in these accounts which is not very clear to me," Alington said drily. "No doubt everything is in order, but I should be glad of an explanation. Unfortunately I cannot go further into matters personally, as I am called away suddenly on special duty. I am leaving you a memorandum on the points about which I wish for information. You will be good enough to write to me, and let me understand what these figures represent. In a week's time I shall be at the seat of government. You will address me there."

He left, doing no more. After two days Macintosh received from a firm of solicitors in Calcutta a cheque for thirty-five thousand rupees. No intimation accompanied it as to who the remitter was, but as he had telegraphed urgently to more than one relative, this seemed to be the reply. He very easily persuaded himself that an aunt who would never acknowledge the loan, and who, as he might have known, could by no means have afforded it, was his secret benefactor; and the money was too welcome for its source to be much questioned. The accounts were worked into shape, and he sure that the required explanation was duly sent to the inspecting officer corroborated by the certificates of one or two civilians from other stations, testifying that they had examined his treasury and found the cash to correspond with the accounts.

When, a few months later, Alington was appointed to the district of Chahpore, the authorities were in some way apprised that he was in debt to a local contractor and money-lender. The man did business both in the district and in Calcutta. Possibly one of his competitors, knowing of the loan and apprehensive that a creditor of an influential official might have advantages over himself, may have been the informant. An exalted personage in Calcutta, in an interview, put the point to Alington,

who denied nothing, but declined to say definitely how the debt originated. The money was needed for his private concerns, he said. It was not unnatural if this was interpreted to imply that he had been involved more or less directly in the share speculation which has been mentioned. At any rate his indebtedness was shown to have arisen at the particular time when that speculation collapsed. His appointment was cancelled, and we know what followed.

With the vanishing rupee and the boy to educate in England, he had saved nothing. But when he ultimately retired, most, if not all, of his debt had been discharged.

Macintosh has risen in the service, and will rise further. When he heard of Alington's supersession he said little, but that he was an absurdly over-rated man, infinitely less acute than he was represented.

As for Alington, perhaps you will point out that he sought to atone for one wrong by committing another. I am not taking his part. He was a clever man, but a weak one. I merely said that his case was not so simple as it seemed.

E. C. HAMLEY.

Whom the Queen delighteth to Honour.

SIR HENRY IRVING, JULY, 1895.

OUR loved Sir Henry, true and loyal knight,
Exalted by the Lady of the Land
As champion of our art, to win the fight
And bear the mead of honour from her hand !
No, not for self-applause or vulgar pride
Thy forehead shines beneath the victor's crown,
But for thy comrades' sake—no more denied
Their portion 'mongst the heirs of fair renown.
Upborne by them, as on the warrior's shield,
In Britain's youth, the leader of the free
Was raised in triumph from the hard-fought field,
What greater glory yet remains to thee ?

Our hearts of island oak thy power hath won
To live with Shakespeare and with Tennyson !

EMILIA AYLMER GOWING.

The Dramatic Season 1894-5.

THE dramatic season which is just over presents one of the most curiously unsatisfactory pages in the annals of theatrical London. We use the word "curiously" advisedly, for notwithstanding that our stage has probably never before possessed so many actors and actresses of real ability, and that they have obtained ample opportunities of showing their versatility, owing to the unusual number of plays that have been produced during the past year, it is only in a very few cases in the higher walks of the drama that genuine success has been attained. It is regrettable to have to record that though, throughout the whole period, our theatres have been given up almost entirely to the plays of English authors, never has there been a more depressing series of productions than that which has just come to an end. In a year in which there has been, we think, no single representation of any of his plays, the Ibsen craze may, we hope, be said to be practically over and done with for good and all. It has, however, left many perceptible traces on the work of our own playwrights, some of them highly beneficial, but many of them the reverse. To the great Norwegian—for undeniably great he is in point of intellect, much as we may dislike the dreary nastiness of the major portion of his work—we are indebted for the abolition of much of the purely theatrical and eminently unnatural from our stage; but the benefit we have derived therefrom has been in a great measure discounted by the impenetrable gloom, to say nothing of the squalor and degradation we have been forced to endure, not only in witnessing the wearisome productions of the plays of the master himself, in former years, but also in the works of so many of the dramatists of to-day, which are undeniably to be traced to his influence.

But it would be unfair to attribute to Ibsen alone all the ills from which we have been suffering in the shape of the numerous uninteresting and preposterous plays which have been given a hearing during the past season, and have, we fear, resulted so disastrously, if not for all, for many of the managers of our principal playhouses. Our theatres have, without exception, been suffering from an attack of the dismals, an epidemic which has

spread even to pantomime, and wiped out burlesque altogether. Each of our leading dramatists has given us at least one piece, but, save in one case, it cannot be said that the literature of the stage has in any way benefited thereby. At the same time it must be admitted that the few plays derived from foreign sources which have been presented have not contained any features of such merit as would make us wish to return to the interminable flood of adaptations from the French which deluged our stage a few years ago.

Beginning cheerfully with Mr. Sidney Grundy's brilliant if unequal "New Woman," and that really capital Adelphi drama, "The Fatal Card," one almost hoped that the season was going to be at any rate one which would afford amusement to audiences and profit to managers, but fate—and shall we say the managers themselves?—had willed that it should be otherwise, and we soon found ourselves hemmed in on all sides by gloom and depression, whether the play was intentionally grave or would-be gay. The woman with a past was rampant, and would in all probability be so still if she had not been partially effaced by Mr. Pinero's "Mrs. Ebbsmith," with her undeniable present, and Mr. Jones's shameless French hussy, who had not only a present but, judging from appearances, several futures. We have often been told that the modern playgoer wants realism, but though at one time vice and ugliness did arouse his curiosity to a certain extent, he soon sickened of their deadly dulness, and has, we fear, of late, shown his appreciation of their merits as a mainstay of an evening's entertainment, by discreetly staying away from the houses where the so-called problem plays have formed the staple of attraction. It is to be hoped that both managers and playwrights will profit by the painful experience of shocking business that has been the result, for there has been a succession of short runs at most theatres almost unprecedented in later years. That the days of long runs are over, for the present, there can be no doubt, and it cannot in any way be looked upon as a matter of regret; but at the same time one cannot help thinking that if better pieces had been placed upon the stage they would have met with greater favour, and have had longer lives than those which have fallen to the lot of the majority of the plays submitted to metropolitan audiences since last September.

We all know that the managers have had an unusual number

of foes to contend with during the last twelve months, in the shape of bad weather and rival entertainments, to say nothing of the heat and a general election at the end of it, which took people out of town earlier than usual. Without doubt they have been in a great measure affected by these causes ; but there have been other years in which it has frozen quite as hard outside the play-house without the effects of frost being so terribly visible on the stage, and to judge from recent proceedings the managers of rival shows have been even less successful than their legitimate brethren, and the real reason of failure must be sought for elsewhere. Either the public which used to support our theatres has ceased to take as great an interest in them as it did formerly, or it has not found sufficient food for entertainment within their doors.

It may be that by the lavish expenditure and admirable taste that have been bestowed on some of the productions of former years, the ideas of audiences have been raised to a higher standard and more is expected than used to be the case, but it is certainly not for want of notice being taken of the theatre, both by the press and society, that it has not thriven, for never before have actors individually and as a body been so freely advertised as at the present time. Every weekly paper has its theatrical columns, and a large number of those which are not professedly theatrical devote much of their space and the majority of their illustrations to the latest productions of the stage. Our leading critics are almost hysterical in their enthusiasm over the performances of whatever actress may be their pet at the moment, and give vent to it in columns of gush. It is true that in six months time they will most likely have given the unfortunate young lady a back seat in their affections, and have taken another in her stead, allowing their former *innamorata* no shred of talent with which to cover her. Only one thing is certain : she is either superhumanly perfect, or the absolute reverse, and after having raised her to a pinnacle of fame, to which she is unfortunately only too often unworthy to soar, they will not scruple to dash her down unmercifully and scatter the pavement with her gore. It may be a mere beginner, or an actress who has devoted all her life to her art, or it may be even a *café chantant* singer ; the same terms are used, the same allusions made to "her childlike simplicity," "her almost painful realism," or "her corn-coloured

hair," as the case may be. The "childlike simplicity" is probably due to nervousness, the "painful realism" more probably due to ugliness, and the "corn-coloured hair" most probably due to dye, but it is all one to them; gush they must and gush they do. But what is the result? Does it make the audiences at the theatre at which the siren is appearing larger? Judging from experience, we fear not.

It may be that in this very advertising and superabundant enthusiasm rests one of the causes of the great lack of interest in things theatrical which has become apparent of late with the outside public. Is it that they no longer place any faith in critics, and that they are tired and sick of the endless interviews with and reproductions of portraits of every one in any way connected with the theatre, from its highest lights down, one might almost say, to the call-boy, with which we have been so overwhelmed of late, and that they wish the stage and all its satellites at Jericho?

Rob the drama of some of its illusions and show even partially the wires that move the puppets and the glamour that ought to surround it is lost, and the very best acting becomes nothing more than the mouthing and grimacing of ordinary men and women, performed with a greater or less amount of ability, and ceases to produce the effect on the feelings it intends to do. Doubtless there is a certain section of society which takes a modified interest in the arrangement of the back drawing-room of Miss Snellicci's flat in the Tottenham Court Road, but we cannot help thinking that there is a much larger proportion of the public which would appreciate her efforts as an actress a great deal more if the article which describes the draperies which surround her mantelpiece did not at the same time inform them that she is the wife of an accountant and the mother of a large and thriving family. If we hear Ophelia ordering her shoulder of mutton and onion sauce before she starts for the theatre, we cannot be expected to be affected by her pathos in the same manner in which we should have been if she had come before us simply as an exquisite embodiment of the poet's fancy.

But it was not the merits or demerits of theatrical advertisement that it was intended to discuss here, but rather the present state of our theatres from the audience's point of view, and when

we say audience, we do not mean simply the people who fill the house, but those who are capable of appreciating a good play well acted, when they have the good fortune to see one. It is these people who have had cause to complain during the past season, for in very few cases has anything like a good *ensemble* been obtained. Even the Lyceum, where one expects to find everything done in the best style, has not been wholly exempt from the cruel dreariness that has reigned supreme. Certainly during some part of the time Sir Henry Irving has, in the Corporal Gregory Brewster of the "Story of Waterloo," given us one of the most finished studies of an old man that the modern stage in England has yet attained; a study, indeed, of such exquisite finish and accuracy that it will be always remembered as one of his finest impersonations. Never has he acted better or sunk his marked mannerisms so much, the whole performance showing how a really great artist can elevate an almost trivial theme to a position of the first importance. This season, too, has given us his "Don Quixote," a beautiful piece of acting, worthy of a better background, for never can the Don himself have had a more adequate representative, though little, unfortunately, can be said for acting of the minor characters of the piece or for the mangled version of Cervantes we were asked to accept as a play. But brilliant as his performance was in each case, it was not the production of either that was the event of the first importance in the past few months of the Lyceum's history. It was rather the "King Arthur" which took the lead and which was, as a whole, in spite of Mr. Forbes Robertson's ideal Lancelot, and in spite of the lavish, one might almost say loving, care that had been expended on the mounting, a distinct disappointment. We heard so much beforehand about the version that Mr. Comyns Carr was preparing, following the lines laid down by Sir Thomas Malory, in preference to those of Tennyson, that our hopes ran high, and we looked for a fitting representation of an inspiring and essentially English subject. But what did we find? An Arthur of Burne Jones and Irving, but certainly not of Malory, and a vision of the Holy Grail, resembling more than anything else the phantom manufactured of a turnip-lantern and a sheet with which we used to try and frighten the housemaid in the days of our youth.

But let us turn at once to the one performance which has given

us a perfect *ensemble*. If the ideal has been denied proper representation by our managers, the realistic has at any rate been given every chance in Mr. Hare's production of Mr. Pinero's latest play, "The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith," at the Garrick. In this—the one satisfactory play of the year—everything was well done, from the superb acting of Mrs. Patrick Campbell as the heroine, to the grey flannel shirt worn by Mr. Aubrey Smith as the country parson. Mrs. Campbell's acting alone it is impossible to forget, but never had a star a better company to support her. In addition to this every detail even of the most minute description had been attended to both by playwright and manager, and the result was ample recompense for the thought and trouble that must have been devoted to it to bring it about. The servants were foreign, and for the first time we believe on our stage spoke their native tongue; the scene was a palace converted into an hotel, and it looked it; the leading lady did not scruple to wear the most hideously unbecoming evening dress that, it is to be hoped, has ever fallen to the lot of mortal woman, in order to suit the exigencies of the part; in fact, there was only one small blot apparent even to the most captious, and that was the wicked way in which Miss Ellis Jeffreys over-dressed the part she acted so admirably. Then there was Mr. Hare's Duke, played as only Mr. Hare can play such a part, and Mr. Forbes Robertson's masterly rendering of a most difficult and unsympathetic character, to say nothing of Mr. Aubrey Smith's excellent impersonation of the flannel-shirted parson before mentioned. If the main theme of the play was rather morbid, it is anyhow cheering to be able to chronicle that in the season of 1894-5 there was produced at any rate one play brilliantly conceived and written from start to finish, and acted in a manner it would be hard to beat on any stage. Perhaps the surrounding gloom made us inclined to think more highly of this one gleam of light, but we do not think this was the case; and a play which had to undergo the keenest criticism and much inevitable comparison came through the ordeal triumphant.

In saying that this was the only play produced during the season by which our literature would be in any way benefited we were perhaps a trifle hasty, as exception should also be made in this respect in favour of Mr. Henry James's "Guy Domville," which although in no way fitted for the stage of to-day, was

universally allowed to be from a literary standpoint far above the average of ordinary dramatic writing.

Mr. Henry Arthur Jones, an unequal dramatist at the best of times, has never shown himself more so than in his two latest productions, neither of which had sufficient merit to make amends for the ponderous names with which he chose to burden them. "The Case of Rebellious Susan," by far the best of the two, was entirely spoiled by the clumsy nature of its ill-drawn comic relief; but although it was consequently ruined from an artistic point of view, it contained several well thought out characters and scenes, which gave the actors some excellent opportunities, of which they availed themselves, and, moreover, it retained the attention of the audience to the finish. Would that we could say as much for the same author's other work, "The Triumph of the Phillistines, &c.," a play with only one redeeming feature, in which an entire ignorance of the ways and customs of ordinary life was manifested, of which one did not think even Mr. Jones was capable. The redeeming feature alluded to above was the finely-drawn if repulsive French model, which gave Miss Juliette Nesville such a good opportunity of showing what a really excellent actress she is when furnished with a part in any way worthy of her powers. Though not intentionally a one part piece, what the performance would have been like had this character fallen into other hands it is really terrible to picture; for the remainder of the caste one would have no feeling other than that of intense pity.

"The New Woman," referred to before, was the only new play coming from Mr. Sidney Grundy's pen with which we were favoured, and although it was not by any means a great or convincing piece of work, it furnished good parts and smart speeches for such capable performers as Miss Rose Leclercq, Miss Winifred Emery and Mr. Cyril Maude, and moreover enjoyed a very considerable success. Mr. Carton and Mr. Haddon Chambers, both of whom have at different times given us good plays, have not, it is to be feared, in any way increased their reputations or embellished the literature of the country with "The Home Secretary" or "John-a-Dreams," though each piece has secured a fair measure of public approval. It is to be hoped that Mr. Carton will not forsake the sphere of domestic comedy in which he is so admirable, as there are so few dramatists capable of making a homely subject interesting, and he

scarcely seems so much at his ease in the field of melodrama, upon the borders of which he has encroached in his last piece. Mr. Haddon Chambers succeeded far better with melodrama pure and simple in the "Fatal Card" than he did in his later and more ambitious play, but it can be said of the latter that, though not wholly successful, it showed a marked improvement in style on his former efforts in the same direction. "The Derby Winner," the only spectacular drama in any way capable of being considered as a serious rival to the Adelphi piece, was an excellent thing in its way, and afforded splendid opportunities to Mrs. John Wood of showing her ability in the *rôle* of the always impossible stage duchess, who must be a first cousin to the stage Irishman, now happily no more, so little does she resemble anything that is human, and also gave Miss Alma Stanley scope for showing unsuspected power in the part of the humorous female villain she played so well.

After these half-dozen or so productions have been enumerated there is nothing left but a hideous chaos of musical comedy, feeble comic opera and farce. As some of the first-mentioned have been remarkably successful in this season of failures, they shall be dealt with before either of the two older forms of entertainment out of which they have been evolved. The former home of real burlesque, the Gaiety, the very name of which conjures up fond memories of Nelly Farren, Edward Terry and Kate Vaughan, and later on of poor Fred Leslie, after a struggle to maintain the old form of entertainment with "Don Juan" and the ill-judged revival of "Little Jack Sheppard," has at last yielded to the popular demand, and musical farce holds sway here as elsewhere, and it may be added with the greatest success. "The Shop Girl," if it does not suit the palate of certain cavillers, has at any rate hit the public taste, principally, we imagine, on the merits of its cleverly-executed Japanese dance and those of a song, which shall be nameless, borrowed from the music halls. It must be added, however, that it has introduced to this class of work two young artists singularly well fitted for it in the persons of Mr. Seymour Hicks and Miss Ada Reeve. Of "Gentleman Joe," a piece we believe enjoying a huge success upon the sole merits of Mr. Arthur Roberts' impersonation of a hansom cabman, there is little to be said except that Mr. Arthur Roberts is, with his seemingly inexhaustible fund of genuine wit and

unrivalled impromptu, as amusing as ever, and that when he is on the stage all is life and laughter, and when he is not, all is gloom and balderdash. "An Artist's Model," though perhaps containing some better writing than either of the other two, is, if possible, even more incoherent, and only makes us think how much better Mr. Hayden Coffin used to sing than he does now, and that we very much prefer Miss Letty Lind when she dances more and sings less. "Dandy Dick Whittington," in which Miss May Yohé performed, should, we suppose, be also enumerated among the musical farces.

Though it is greatly to be regretted that pieces of this type have completely extinguished the sacred lamp of burlesque proper, one cannot blame managers for producing them while the public will flock to see them. So much cannot, it is feared, be said for "His Excellency" and "The Chieftain," the two sole representatives of comic opera that have been given. In spite of the quartette of old and tried Savoy favourites, engaged, we were told, at enormous salaries and headed by Mr. George Grossmith, which was included in the caste of the first-named, and in spite of the fact that Miss Florence St. John, still without rival as a delightful singer, possessing also a sense of humour, was prima donna in the second, neither piece found lasting favour with the public, and only proved once again that Mr. W. S. Gilbert and Sir Arthur Sullivan when apart are—well—not so good by any means as they were in partnership.

In farce the first place has been taken by "Vanity Fair," a play which has met with some success, principally owing to the really comic acting of Mrs. John Wood as the heroine, an ex-music-hall singer, and Mr. Arthur Cecil as her only friend. It is, however, disappointing, as coming from the pen of Mr. G. W. Godfrey, who appears to have got a little behind the times, and from whom better things were to be expected. "The Passport," though produced late in the year, calls for mention as rather above the average, an amusing idea being well worked out without being overdone, and Miss Gertrude Kingston's impersonation of yet another stupid woman being particularly clever. Farce has also been presented at Toole's, "Thoroughbred;" Terry's, "The Blue Boar" and "An Innocent Abroad," and at the Comedy "The Prude's Progress," to say nothing of the several abortive performances that have taken place in the theatres at

the eastern end of the Strand, and the seemingly everlasting "Charley's Aunt," which is, to quote the play-bills, "still running."

Of course there have been several revivals, as there always must be in a season of moderate successes. These it is not intended to discuss here, though it would be unmannerly to pass without comment the variable "Fedora" of Mrs. Patrick Campbell, or the delightful "Two Gentlemen of Verona," at Daly's, which gave us a chance of seeing what can be done with a play hitherto considered almost unactable, and also of seeing Miss Ada Rehan's Julia, a charming addition to her gallery of sketches of Shakespearean heroines. For this and for the fact of Miss Rehan's Helena, one can almost forgive Mr. Daly for his terrible "Midsummer Night's Dream," which seems more like a nightmare, with its pantomime fairies, tawdry panorama, high-heeled Oberon and fearsome Theseus. It seems ungracious to be over severe on a manager who, though till lately a stranger to our shores, has done so much towards giving the present generation of playgoers an opportunity of seeing several of Shakespeare's plays well acted and staged, but we did not expect this of him, and it rather shakes our faith.

The foreign invasion at the end of the season has given us opportunities of renewing our acquaintance with some of the best artists of the continent, as well as seeing some strangers and being able to admire their great merits without at the same time feeling, as used to often be the case, their unmeasurable superiority over our own players. Indeed it is in the admirable all-round acting, that has to a great extent been the rule of late where it used to be the exception, that the only steady advance has been made in things dramatic during the last year; and with this gleam of hope, which leads us to expect better things in the future, let us put an end to our catalogue of complaints.

GUY T. LITTLE.

A Fair Hindoo.

By JOHN H. WILLMER.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE WILD MEN OF THE WOODS.

BEFORE sunrise next morning Vincent was up and on his way to his own tent to see if Devaki was awake. He found she was, and, moreover, in conversation with Ali outside the tent door. He heard Ali say, as he approached from behind the tent:

"I can guess what has brought you : to be with your white-faced lover. By Allah ! if I thought you——"

"Peace ; I'll not have such language. As yet I am not yours—not till you have shown my friends into Yakoob's den."

"I know—I know. But—mind how you treat me ! If you play me false, I'll——"

"Hound ! You insult me. Because your word is not worth a cownie, you judge mine to be the same ? Be careful, or my sahib will have you kicked out of this."

"What is it, Devaki ?" asked Vincent, coming forward.

"I was scolding this man," was the prompt reply. But she did not add her reason for scolding Ali. She was afraid to.

"You are up very early," said Vincent to Ali.

"It is wise to do so, because, if we have any enemies, we can be beforehand. Sahib agrees with me, I'm sure, for he, too, is an early riser."

The sarcasm in the speaker's voice did not escape detection, but Vincent reasoned it was wiser not to notice it.

"My profession obliges me to rouse at any hour," replied the doctor. "This morning I awoke early, being anxious to push on."

"Then rouse the men, sahib ; they still sleep."

"There ! That's the bugle !" exclaimed Devaki.

"So it is," replied Vincent. "Come, Devaki, we'll have something to eat."

Ali stood still for a moment, an angry look in his face, as he saw Devaki take Vincent's hand in hers. He muttered a deep curse, then hurried away to partake of his breakfast.

"Do you know, Devaki," said Vincent as they stood for a moment, hand in hand, inside the tent, "I heard what Ali had to say to you, but I deemed it best to keep quiet. Devaki, you have

promised yourself to me : you must therefore marry *me*, and not Ali."

She withdrew her hand from his and replied :

"Then must I return to Yakoob, sahib."

"Why?"

"I have promised Ali."

"You have promised Ali ! And what of your promise to me ? Do you love *me*, Devaki, or that man ?"

Devaki's eyes grew dim.

"Do you love me?" repeated Vincent.

The girl answered in an almost inaudible voice :

"No."

Then she fled out of the tent and ran to some distance and hid herself in the woods. Vincent saw the direction she took, but did not follow her, for he was feeling sick at heart. He partook of little food that morning, and hastened away to Hoyles to tell him how Devaki had treated him. Hoyles had nothing much of a soothing nature to say to Vincent, who had to be satisfied with : "Wait till we have captured Yakoob ; then I'll send Ali about his business."

The bugles now sounded the "*Fall in*," and the men got into their places ready to march. But the order to do so was not given. Ali was not present to show the way. Devaki, too, was missing. Fearing something wrong, Hoyles asked Vincent to go in search of Ali, but that individual now put in his appearance.

"Sahib," he cried excitedly, "Devaki has been carried off!"

"Where?" asked Hoyles.

"By whom?" demanded Vincent.

"Where, I cannot tell," replied Ali. "But I am of opinion the Ghonds have captured her."

"Heavens!" cried Hoyles.

"You need well be afraid, sahib, for if she be not recovered within a couple of hours, her head will be decorating the floor of some temple."

"But what makes you think she has been carried off?" asked Vincent, hoping Ali had no grounds for his suspicion.

"I saw Devaki, sahib, rush out of your tent and hide in the woods. Half-an-hour passed and she did not return ; then I went in search of her. I followed the track she left in the soft dust ; then, sahib, to my surprise I saw the marks of other feet.

I followed up the marks till I came to a tree where Devaki must have seated herself. Here were evident signs of a struggle, but no Devaki."

Hoyles, on receipt of this news, was undecided how to act. To delay was death to Helen, and yet how could he push on without an effort to rescue Devaki? Ali, however, came to his assistance and settled the question thus: he, Vincent and five soldiers were to go in search of Devaki, while Hoyles was to march forward with the troops—straight on till their further progress was barred by a river flowing through the woods. Ali was confident he would meet Hoyles there, without much delay, after having recovered Devaki.

This arrangement being agreed to, the bugles blared out and the troops moved forward. Vincent and five native soldiers followed Ali to where Devaki had been last seen.

"Here are some marks," said Ali, pointing out to Vincent the impressions made by Devaki's feet in the soft earth. A little further on, Ali halted and said:

"Here is where the Ghonds followed her."

"How do you make that out?" asked Vincent. "I can see no other marks here."

"The Ghonds are clever people, sahib. They have trod, one by one, in the imprint of Devaki's feet; but can you not distinguish toemarks?"

"I can."

"Devaki had on shoes."

"I see. You are a clever fellow, Ali. Hold! I see what appears to be toes on both sides of the feet."

"Right, sahib. The captors returned this way. Now let us disturb these leaves about here. See! Here are footmarks."

"And here!" cried a soldier to the right.

"And here!" from another to the left.

"I thought so," exclaimed Ali. "Sahib, we have to deal with men of cunning. Now which track would you advise us to take?"

"Well, I can't say. Let it be the one to the right."

"Be it so. I'll take the one to the left, and you" (to a native soldier) "take this, leading straight in front. The rest of you remain here. Now listen, sahib, and you. You follow the steps, and if any of you have the luck to trace them for fifty yards, then stop till we join you."

"But how are we to know who is on the right track?"

"You'll know soon enough, sahib, if you chance to take the wrong road. Now let us separate."

Vincent traced the marks for a good twenty yards through bushes, &c.; then he turned sharply to the left, still following the footprints; again to the left and—he was back at the place of starting. Ali was already there.

"Do you understand me now, sahib?" he asked laughing.

"I do," replied Vincent. "By George! I never came across such cunning before."

"And if I mistake not, you will come across yet more. But don't let us waste time talking. Let us follow the track the soldier has taken, for his is the true one."

They advanced about fifty paces into the woods when they met the soldier sitting on a fallen tree, waiting for them. Ali took up the task of tracking, and they advanced swiftly for a couple of hundred yards or so. Then Ali came to a halt. There was not a trace of footprints anywhere.

"I told you, sahib," said he, "they would do something else to throw pursuers off."

"Can't you guess what they have done this time?"

Ali shook his head.

"Here is a bow and some arrows," said a soldier, examining something under a tree.

Ali rushed forward to examine them. Then he looked up the tree and laughed. "I have it, sahib!" he exclaimed. "I have it."

"What, Ali?"

"These Ghonds are cunning, sahib. It had struck me that, to throw off their pursuers, the wild men had climbed this tree, by means of that branch there, nearly touching the ground. But I was puzzled to discover how they had managed about Devaki. The finding of this bow has shown me how they got over the difficulty, and, too, where they alighted."

"Explain yourself."

"Sahib, the bows and arrows were found on the ground here. I naturally looked into the tree to see from where they had fallen."

"And saw ——?"

"That thick branch overhead barked in two places."

"I don't understand yet."

"Because you have not lived long enough in India to know

the habits of the wild men. I'll tell you what they did : they tied a swing."

"A swing?"

"Yes. They chose that high branch that the rope might be long—in fact, that it should swing within seizing distance of that huge rock there. Devaki was placed in the swing and let go. A man on that rock caught her. That is how they have got her across. This bow must have been dropped by one of them, no one seeing it fall. It will be of further use to us, sahib. Your rifles make too great a noise, the arrow carries death silently. Come, sahib, we'll inspect the ground on that side of the rock. I thought so. Here are the footprints again. We can go along much more quickly now."

About mid-day they halted and partook of a hasty meal, then once more they advanced. The business of tracking was tedious, for the wild men knew a number of ways of causing their pursuers to be "at fault." Ali, however, though it took him some time to work out the problems placed before him, was a clever fellow and quite a match for the Ghonds. Time after time he hit the track, and at length, when it was getting dark, he was up with them. He went forward alone to reconnoitre, and returned in about a quarter of an hour with the information that the men numbered twenty—armed with bows and arrows and knives.

"Did you see Devaki?" asked Vincent.

"I did. She was lying on the ground, bound. The men were discussing what to do with her. And I heard one man—I know a little of their language—say that to-morrow would be the full moon and then they would sacrifice the girl and not before."

"Why do they want to kill her?"

"I gathered from their conversation, sahib, that they have had ill luck, lately, in the chase, and they believe a human sacrifice will propitiate their god, who they think is angry, for some reason or other, with them."

"Well, Ali, are we to make a dash for it?"

"No, sahib. You will rush to your death if you do. These men can fight. They are not to be despised. My plan, sahib, is not formed yet. When I see what they are going to do with Devaki for the night, then I'll advise you. Meanwhile, sahib, you stay here with these men. I'll climb one of those trees there and watch all that takes place in the camp of the wild men."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

VINCENT AND ALI SUCCEED IN RESCUING DEVAKI.

ABOUT eight o'clock Ali returned.

"They have stretched themselves out on the ground, sahib, to sleep, and they will sleep soundly, for they have eaten their fill of some wild animals they have killed."

"What have they done with Devaki?"

"She is lying, bound hand and foot, on the ground."

"The scoundrels! She'll die if they leave her like that."

"Leave her they will, sahib. I saw one man mounted guard over her."

"How long will it be before they are all fast asleep?"

"About an hour we should give them."

It was a long and anxious hour—slowly, slowly the minutes went by. Vincent remembered another night when with equal slowness the hours crept on: that night on which he had snatched Devaki from the grave. Would this night see another such rescue? "It will!" cried Vincent in answer to his own thoughts. "Or I too will follow Devaki to the grave."

Many were the thoughts that came crowding in upon his brain as he lay on the ground gazing up at a tiny star visible through a small break in the foliage. Ali's cry, "It is time," came as a relief, and he sprang nimbly to his feet.

"Sahib," said Ali, "my plan is this: We all creep forward till we are in sight of the camp, then you and I go alone; I'll tell you how to act."

Ali had already proved himself so discreet a guide that Vincent readily agreed to be instructed by him. "Ali," said he, "you command, and we'll act."

"Then forward, sahib."

They crept on hands and knees, every now and then stopping for a second or two to breathe, then on again. As soon as they were in sight of the camp they all halted. Vincent peeped out from behind a bush and saw the dusky forms of men lying on the ground. Some little way from them he saw the stretcher on which Devaki lay. Close by, a man was standing on guard, leaning on a long spear, and so motionless that he looked like a bronze statue. While Vincent still watched, he saw him suddenly leap a couple of feet into the air, then fall heavily to the ground.

There he lay close to Devaki, and there was not a movement in him.

"Is that the usual way these fellows tumble into bed?" asked Vincent of Ali, who was on the other side of a bush, behind which both had concealed themselves.

"He is dead, sahib," was the quiet reply.

"Dead!" cried Vincent.

"Hush, sahib. If you speak so loud you will rouse the others. Yes, he is dead. The arrow I fired has gone to his heart. By Allah! my hand is still in. I thought I had forgotten how to find the heart with an arrow. It is years since I used a bow. When I was young, many——"

"Yes, yes, you did many great things—and evils too," said Vincent, interrupting his boastful speech. "Ali, are you forgetting that Devaki is lying there?"

"Allah forbid! Now, sahib, follow me. You others remain here behind this fallen tree. Spread out. That's it. No noise, mind you. Follow me, sahib, on your hands and knees and have your pistols ready for use."

With great caution they crawled along. Nearer and nearer they approached where Devaki, gagged and bound hand and foot, was lying on a bamboo stretcher. Vincent's heart beat fast. The inclination to spring forward and unbind Devaki was strong in him, but by a masterly effort he overcame this feeling, which he knew, did he act on its promptings, would be his and Devaki's death. So he crawled on. Just now, one of the wild men moved a bit, then sat up. He sniffed the air as if he scented danger, and made ready to shoot with his bow and arrow. One glance he gave towards the sentry, and seeing him, as he thought, asleep, muttered something like a curse and was about to spring to his feet, when an arrow from Ali's bow gave him his *quietus*. Ali crept round to where Devaki's head was, and Vincent took hold of the bamboo poles of the stretcher at the other end, and they lifted the girl off the ground and carried her in the direction of the fallen tree behind which the five soldiers were hidden. As they went carefully along Ali looked back. "Let Devaki down," said he in a hoarse whisper to Vincent. This was done immediately, and Ali, placing an arrow in his bow, fired at a man who had sprung to his feet. Before, however, the arrow pierced his brain, the Ghond gave a loud shout, and the dusky

forms, till now lying motionless, became full of life and activity. Meanwhile Ali and Vincent picked up the stretcher again, and ran as hard as they could go towards the fallen tree. They gained it just as a shower of arrows flew past them. With loud yells the wild men came on at a run. "Shoulder! Fire!" cried Vincent. Five rifles rang out, and three men fell to the ground; a fourth dropped a second later, an arrow having pierced his brain. For a moment they hesitated. Vincent feared another charge, for the soldiers' rifles were empty; he, therefore, in quick succession fired both his pistols. This decided the Ghonds how to act. They immediately disappeared in the woods.

"Allah be praised!" exclaimed Ali. "If they had charged, we should all have tasted of the banquet of death."

"Do you think they will return again?" asked Vincent, as he reloaded his revolvers.

"They will follow us now, wherever we go, trying to pick us off, one by one."

Vincent now went up to Devaki and cut away the cords that bound her.

"Devaki," he whispered as he knelt by her side and chafed her hands.

"Sahib," was all she could utter before she began to cry. Closer and closer she drew Vincent's face towards her, till her lips could touch his cheek. Then she whispered: "Sahib, I told you a lie this morning: I said I did not love you. It is the only lie I have ever told. God alone, sahib, knows how much I love you."

Notwithstanding that Ali was looking on, Vincent kissed Devaki over and over again.

"Sahib," said Ali, "if you want to be killed, remember we do not."

Vincent sprang to his feet.

"Fool that I am!" he cried. "Quick, Ali; lift Devaki."

"Nay, sahib, let two of the soldiers do that. We'll have to fight our way through to Major Hoyles."

"I'll walk," said Devaki, rising to her feet, but her limbs were so cramped that she nearly fell. Vincent, making a much more comfortable couch, placed her again on the stretcher, and the two soldiers told off by Ali carried her. They had not advanced far when they saw dark figures darting in and out of the woods.

"They are waiting, sahib," said Ali, "till they get us in a

cleared spot, then they will shoot us down. But I'll take good care that I'll not lead to any cleared spot."

"I should have thought," said Vincent, "that they would attack us while in the woods, concealing themselves behind trees and firing."

"No, sahib," returned Ali; "it is difficult for them to shoot with any success because of the thickness of the woods here, and they must come close to aim. They are afraid of doing that, for they will run the risk of being shot."

"It will be very late before we reach Hoyles," said Vincent. "To-morrow night we must be before Yakoob's stronghold."

"We'll be there," said Ali confidently, but adding shortly afterwards—"if we are not all killed."

Ali's explanation of the reason why the wild men did not attack the party was soon found to be correct. Vincent discovered that they were gradually being driven out of their direct course. This was effected in the following way: the wild men got on to the right and front of the little party and threatened an attack; but Ali swerved around, little by little, till he was going in a direction quite opposite from whence they had come.

Vincent called Ali's attention to this, but the latter replied he would change his course in a minute. They walked on straight now, for the object the wild men had in view was accomplished—that of getting the party in the direction they wanted them to march.

Presently Vincent and his men heard loud yells. Ali immediately called a halt.

"Quick, sahib, to some shelter," cried he. "We have fallen into a nest of Ghonds. Hundreds of them surround us."

Vincent lifted Devaki off the stretcher and carried and placed her behind a fallen tree, then he assisted Ali and the soldiers to construct some rude defences of boughs of trees, behind which they determined to fight to the last.

"Sahib," said Devaki, coming to his side, "you have two pistols in your belt; give me one and I'll fight too."

"You, Devaki? Lie down behind that tree. You'll be killed if you stand here. Why, you do not know how to fire a pistol."

"But I can learn, sahib. And I prefer death to falling into the hands of those men."

"But, Devaki——"

"Sahib, in this matter I will not listen to you. The more

there are to fight, the better. It is getting late, sahib ; show me how to use the pistol."

Seeing it was useless reasoning with her, Vincent did as he was asked ; and Devaki blushed with pleasure when Vincent called her a brave girl. There was not much time for further conversation, however, for the Ghonds, having arranged their plans, were now coming on. Slowly at first they advanced. Then, while yet five hundred yards off, they got into a clear passage and broke into a run, which increased in speed as they approached nearer to the square.

"Present Fire!" cried Vincent, and three of the five soldiers discharged their pieces. Though three of their men fell, the Ghonds still charged on. The reserve was now ordered to fire, and this discharge sent the wild men to the right-about. Immediately the danger was over for the time, Vincent turned to see how Devaki was, and he was glad to find she was unhurt. The excitement had brought quite a colour to her face.

"Are you hurt?" asked Vincent, to make doubly sure that none of the flying arrows and spears had wounded her.

"Not a scratch, sahib," replied the girl, laughing. "See!" she exclaimed, "I, too, fired."

"Well done, Devaki!" cried Vincent. "I little thought, when I saw you for the first time—when you were so shy and timid—that you would face a day like this. Come, now, help me lengthen these spears—there are a number lying about."

"How lengthen them, sahib?"

"Make two into one."

"What is that for, sahib?"

"You will not be afraid if I tell you?"

"Sahib!"

"I beg your pardon. Well, our ammunition is nearly out. The men brought but few charges with them."

"I understand you," said Devaki, without the trace of any fear on her face.

The spears were soon got ready, and each of them placed one at his side as he stood at his allotted post.

They had not long to wait for the second charge. With frightful yells the wild men rushed down upon the square, shooting their arrows and throwing their spears. One of the soldiers at Vincent's side fell wounded to the ground. There was no

time, however, to see to the man, for the wild men were close at hand. The soldiers fired volley after volley with their rifles, while Vincent and Devaki repeatedly discharged their pistols, and Ali sent not a few arrows into the ranks of the Ghonds. But to no effect. Although many of them fell, yet this time they did not turn and fly; their fury was at full pitch, and like a flood they burst upon the square, sweeping everything before them. Throwing aside their rifles, the soldiers seized their long spears and fought with them, while Vincent defended himself and Devaki with his sword. Ali and he, with their backs to a tree and Devaki crouching down between them, kept the Ghonds at bay. But their arms were beginning to ache, and they must soon give in, when a loud cheer—a British “Hurrah!”—burst upon their ears and gave renewed strength to their arms. The Ghonds heard the “hurrah” too. Still they hesitated whether to fight or run, when a discharge from about twenty rifles decided the question: they turned and fled into the woods.

“Saved! Thank God!” exclaimed Hoyles, taking Vincent’s hand. “And Devaki?”

“I am here, sahib.”

Hoyles lifted her from the ground and kissed her, while tears ran down his cheeks. “Thank God!” he muttered. “Thank God! Thank God!”

Vincent had left them and was attending to the wounded. Of the five soldiers, three were killed and one mortally wounded. He died while Vincent was examining him. All four were buried in one grave. The Ghonds were let lie where they were, for Ali said that their friends would come for them before long.

“How did you manage to find us?” asked Vincent of Hoyles.

“We are close at hand here. We heard firing, and thinking it might be your party, I hurried on with these men. How far did you think you were from us?”

“We had lost our bearings,” and Vincent told Hoyles, as they returned to camp, their adventures. Nor did he forget to mention Devaki’s bravery, much to the embarrassment of that young lady.

They reached the camp in about an hour’s time. It was now eleven o’clock.

“Sahib,” said Ali to Major Hoyles, “if we want to save Helen Missy we must start now.”

“Now?”

"Now, sahib. By daylight we'll reach Yakoob's den. Then the men can rest till night."

After consulting with Shilstone and Vincent, Hoyles gave the necessary orders, and within an hour's time the men were on the march again, and moving faster than hitherto, for they were now out of the jungle.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE ROBBER STRONGHOLD.

AFTER a weary three hours' march, a halt was called and the men allowed to rest; then, after about an hour, the march was resumed. It was nearly sunrise when the soldiers entered a thick jungle, and by a path, known only to himself, Ali led them where no man would think of coming. No attack was to be made to-day, for Ali thought the fort too strong to be attacked in broad daylight by so few men.

Luckily, the men had brought extra provisions with them, and immediately set about making preparations for breakfast.

"Is sahib hungry? Or would sahib like to have a look at the fort?" asked Ali of Vincent.

"A look at the fort, by all means," said Shilstone, answering for himself and Vincent.

Having obtained permission from Hoyles, the two young men followed Ali, who quickly advanced into the thick jungle. Now, still under shelter of the umbrageous wood, they commenced climbing a steep hill.

"Be careful how you tread, sahibs," cautioned the guide. "There are men above us. Study every step. Feel the ground and displace no stones. If you follow carefully my track all will be well."

It was a long climb up the steep hill, and difficult. The summit, however, was gained in safety. The guide cautioned quietness, for he said that, two hundred yards from where they were, was a guard-house held by about twenty men.

Ali led them forward, and there, hardly a stone's-throw away, was the fort. The hills, in deep undulations, extended on all sides, and were clothed with impenetrable forests. The fort was built on an isolated hill, conical in shape. On every side of it were deep ravines, and thick jungles covered the hill, terminating only in the walls of the fort, which were four to five feet high.

In the centre of the fort rose a cone, and towered high above the fortifications. On the very top, here, was built a large mosque.

As the men yet examined the place, the interior of which was spread out to them, for the plateau on which they were, was on a level with the vertex of the cone and looked over the fortifications, they saw a man ascend one of the tall minarets of the mosque and, turning his face Mecca-wards, invite the faithful to prayers.

"It is the hour appointed for the *Es-sebah*, morning prayers," said Ali, and devout Mohammedan that he was, he spread out his handkerchief and knelt thereon.

On the still, clear air floated the call of the *Mueddin*:

"A-i-a-e salah! A-i-a-e salah! A-i-a-e ala el felah! Es salaton hairoon min en naoom! La ilaha ila Allah!"

Up the hill poured the worshippers; presently they divided and ranged themselves on each side of the steps leading to the mosque. Now a man richly clad, and before whom marched a guard, could be seen ascending. Vincent and Shilstone were not left long in doubt as to whom this personage might be, for Ali, springing to his feet and forgetting all about his devotions, shook his fist in the direction of the man as he exclaimed:

"That is the Khan, sahib! The dog! By Allah! this is the last morning service he'll attend."

Shilstone and Vincent soon took their gaze off the worshippers and began to minutely examine the fort.

"It would not be a bad plan," said Shilstone, "to post men around the fort on these hills, and, under cover of the woods, harass the enemy."

Ali did not approve of Shilstone's suggestion. Such a method, he argued, would necessitate delay. And then, the robbers knew so well the intricacies of the forest that they could easily escape if hard pressed; or, worse still, oust the few soldiers sent to besiege them.

Vincent, though he did not believe the robbers were capable of putting the English to flight, threw in his vote in favour of persuading Hoyles, who had some thoughts of attacking the fort by day, to surprise the robbers by night.

"Whereabouts is Missy Helen imprisoned?" asked Vincent.

"See that white house, surrounded by high walls, half-way up the hill?"

"Yes."

"That's it. She is alone there. The Khan's palace is on the other side. It is well fortified. But, it is written in the Book of Fate, he'll die to-morrow. But, sahib, see how light it is getting; we must away."

They quickly, but carefully, descended the hill, and now, as they were nearing the bottom, a "*Sch!*" escaped the guide's lips.

"What's the matter?" inquired Vincent in a whisper.

"Men coming. Hide here—quick."

They concealed themselves behind some thick bushes, and none too soon; for a body of twelve men now came in sight.

"Did none of you hear a noise?" asked one.

"By the Prophet! what a question. Are not these woods alive with wild animals?"

"You may laugh," said the first speaker, "but I've not lived a wild life for nothing. I can tell at once the tread of a man from a beast."

"Then have a hunt," replied he who had so quickly picked up and ridiculed the question asked. "Come, brothers, we'll rest while Hassan searches the woods."

"What will you give me, Moosa," asked Hassan, "if I bring you news, or prove to you that this track has been crossed by strange men this morning?"

"Five rupees."

"I accept your bet."

Every word of the conversation had been heard by those in the bush, and they prepared themselves to fight to the death.

"There are only twelve of them," said Shilstone in a whisper to Vincent. "We can easily manage four apiece."

"Yes," acknowledged Vincent. "But remember, Shilstone, we'll put the garrison on their guard by being discovered here. So don't be rash. Wait till we are actually discovered, then fight. Even then, in dire necessity only, use your pistols. We may be able to polish off all these beggars with our swords."

"Quiet now. Here comes the man," as Hassan, eager to win the bet, advanced towards the very bush in which they were.

The rest of the robbers spread themselves out on the ground, and one or two producing *hookahs*,* they began to smoke and gossip.

Hassan looked about him warily, and once or twice, stooping down, examined carefully the footprints in the dust. Nearer

* Hubble-bubbles.

and nearer he came, and now he was about stepping around the bush, when Moosa called out to him:

"Have a care, Hassan! It may have been *Sheitan** himself who created the noise."

Hassan, though he feared no man, lived in mortal dread of *Sheitan*. He turned pale and quickly retraced his steps, every now and then casting a glance over his shoulders to see if he were followed. Quietly, as he seated himself, he put his hand into his pocket and handed over five rupees to Moosa, who, with the others, was roaring with laughter.

"Well," said Kurrim, another of the band, "as we have seated ourselves, I propose we remain here awhile."

His proposition was carried, much to the annoyance of Shilstone and Vincent.

"Have you heard the news?" asked Kurrim.

"What news, brother?" inquired Moosa.

"The Khan is going to give a big *khana*† to the whole garrison to-night. There will be a *tomasha*‡ also, to-morrow, for the Khan is going to wed the Faringi girl."

Vincent started and stood up. Ali and Shilstone held him.

"Be quiet," whispered Shilstone. "You'll betray us in a minute."

"Hear that?" asked Hassan.

"Hear what?" asked his companions.

"A noise in the bush."

"A noise again!" exclaimed Moosa. "Will you take another bet?"

The others laughed, and Hassan kept a sullen silence after this.

"About this *khana* to-night. We'll miss the feast," grumbled Suliman, an obese creature.

"Not we," replied Kurrim. "The whole of us are to collect in the fort to-night. The Khan says there is no fear of our retreat being discovered."

"*Shabash! Shabash!*" cried one and all.

"Heard anything of Ali?" asked Moosa of no one in particular.

"Nothing," replied Kurrim. "I'm sorry he and the Khan have fallen out."

* The evil one.

† Dinner.

‡ Entertainment.

"So am I. Do you think he'll split on us now?"

"If dead men can, he will."

This drew a laugh.

"Dead? No one found his body."

"After the flogging, do you remember, he ran away, and the Khan fired at him."

"Well?"

"I saw him drop with my own eyes. We did not search for the body till evening, and by that time, no doubt, there was a feast going on somewhere in the forest."

The *hookahs* had now gone the complete round of the company; so Moosa, who appeared to be in charge, made the men "fall in," and marched them off.

As soon as the coast was clear, the guide quickly made his way towards the camp, followed by the two Englishmen.

"Ali, were you really hit?" asked Vincent, as they descended the hill.

"No," laughed the guide. "I made as if I were, then slipped into the bushes, and soon as it was dark, slowly journeyed to Mariepoor, bringing Devaki with me."

The camp was reached in safety. Hoyles had been very anxious about the doctor and Shilstone, thinking Ali had betrayed them. He, however, changed his opinion about the guide when Shilstone related to him the conversation they had been compelled to listen to.

The whole of that day Vincent was in a state of excitement. He hailed the setting of the sun with joy. Now he became less uneasy in mind, and ate and drank and talked.

"When do we start, Ali?" he inquired.

"About two in the morning."

Here was a damper to his cheerfulness, and once more he sobered down. His conversation, too, after this, lacked spirit.

By now the sun had gone to rest, and soon, from out the bosom of the east, sprang night, who, unfolding her dark mantle from about her, spread it in the heavens and enveloped earth in blackness.

(To be continued.)

LONDON SOCIETY

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Alfreda.

By MRS. LODGE,
Author of "GEORGE ELVASTON," etc.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FOR some time past nothing had been heard of Alex Cameron or the men under his command.

Tidings had reached the company's offices in Cowl Court of the party of explorers having reached the Cape in safety, also that they had started for the interior fully equipped and in high spirits.

Later accounts from time to time informed the company's secretary of their successful progress across the desert, and later on still that they had reached the Zougá, with some loss of cattle and property, but in fairly good health.

That was some four months ago, and since then no direct communication had been received from any member of the exploring party.

People at length began to feel uneasy concerning their fate, and much anxiety was felt by Alex Cameron's friends when letters from him ceased to arrive by the Cape mails.

Merryman, his old clerk, had been in a state of chronic misery since his employer's letters ceased to arrive ; he was desponding before, he was now in absolute despair.

On going one morning to his solitary office, he stopped at the newsvender's, as usual, to purchase his morning paper.

Merryman delighted, above all things, in the morning papers. The newspapers contained the only literature he ever read, and he generally began his paper at the first page and read through to the last.

Once quietly seated at his desk he would unfold his cherished newspaper and for awhile forget his misery and his loneliness.

Reading on slowly and methodically on this particular morning, he at length came to a paragraph that froze the life-blood in his veins.

This paragraph stated that intelligence had reached Cape Town, that nearly every member of the exploring expedition had been stricken down with fever, when within a few days' journey of Lake Ngami.

Mr. Cameron, it was further stated, was almost the first to succumb to the disease ; he had borne up bravely under repeated attacks of illness, brought on for the most part on account of the drought and scarcity of water, but the unhealthiness of the climate had proved too much for his strong endurance at last, and it was possible, from the privations they were called on to endure, that not one of the little party would ever recross the desert alive.

So stunned was the poor old clerk at finding his worst fears confirmed, that he dropped forward with a deep groan, and would have fallen on the floor had not the high desk supported his head and shoulders.

How long he remained in a state of insensibility he could not even guess ; he felt ill and dazed for some time after he recovered partial consciousness, and was only aroused from his state of stupor at last by oft-repeated knocking at the door.

He could not remember where he was for some moments ; he heard the knocking like one just awakened out of a heavy slumber ; at length, more from habit than set purpose, he got down from his office stool and proceeded to open the door.

There was seldom light enough on the landing outside for any one to see a person distinctly from the door of Mr. Merryman's office.

All that the old clerk was able to distinguish in the semi-obscurity, when he first opened the door, was a tall slender figure attired in a long black mantle.

In a moment it flashed on his mind that this was another tall dark woman who had come to inquire concerning his late advertisements in the *Times*.

Despairing, at length, of finding Alice Mathers and her child, he had caused some half-dozen advertisements to be inserted in the *Times*, stating that if A. M. would call at a certain address in the Temple, she would hear of something to her advantage.

To judge by the number of women that answered this advertisement in person, they who owned A. M. as their initial letters must have been legion.

For the first week, the stairs and pavement leading to Alex Cameron's chambers were blocked by females of all ages from

seventeen to seventy, and poor Merryman had rather a trying time of it, until he caused a notice to be posted at the entrance that no more A. M.'s need apply.

This tall person was certainly another A. M., although the notice had been posted at the door three weeks since, and remained there yet.

The old man's heart beat quickly ; this woman was tall—could it be Alice, at last ?

"Can I see Mr. Merryman ?" asked a low, sweet voice from under the thick veil.

The clerk started ; surely he had heard that voice before ; he was too astonished to answer a word.

The lady repeated the question in a louder tone, thinking from his manner he was hard of hearing.

"Yes, ma'am, my name is Merryman," said he, in a dazed sort of way. He was trying to remember where he had heard that voice before.

"Will you allow me to enter, please ? I have come to make inquiry about Mr. Cameron. I shall not detain you many minutes."

"Ah ! yes, I remember !" ejaculated the old clerk, tears springing to his eyes as he moved aside and invited her to enter. When he had closed the door, he looked about for a chair, but they were all so worn and dusty, he was quite ashamed to offer her one.

Alex Cameron's private rooms had seldom been opened since Lady Chineron had paid that secret and memorable visit there some months ago. Yet with native politeness Mr. Merryman begged her to wait a moment whilst he unlocked the door of the inner room and opened the windows.

This was a work of some minutes, but when all was ready, he invited her to enter and placed a chair for her near the open window.

She threw back her thick veil, dropped the dark wrap from her shoulders, and stood before the old clerk fair as a poet's dream.

He had only caught a passing glance at her face, when she paid a visit to Alex Cameron, on the eve of his departure from England, yet her features appeared quite familiar to him.

It seemed as though he had seen a face very like the one before him, looking out of that open window, with the same far-away look in the deep-blue eyes, many a time and oft before to-day.

At length she turned from the window with a long-drawn sigh and inquired when he had last heard from Mr. Cameron.

This brought the old clerk back once more to the sad intelligence he had read that morning in the newspaper.

He had not quite out-lived his days of romance, and at once concluded that Alex Cameron was her lover.

Doubtless she had not seen the morning papers, and had come to him, hoping to hear some recent tidings of the absent one.

He must be wary, lest he gave her a sudden shock. "I have not received a letter from Mr. Cameron for some time ; he was fairly well then," he replied hesitatingly.

"Will you kindly tell me the date of that letter?" she asked eagerly. "It is six months since any of his friends have received any direct communication from him, and they are beginning to feel very anxious about him."

"I am not quite certain about the date of his last letter ; however, I will fetch it, and you can see for yourself," replied the clerk ; and leaving the room he returned in a few minutes with the letter in his hand ; then once more left the room, thinking she wished to be alone.

His heart was too full to speak ; the sight of his employer's handwriting, after what he had just read in the papers, quite unnerved him.

"I hope she won't ask to see the *Times*," he said half-aloud as he mounted his office-stool, and leaning his head on the desk, wept silently, like one mourning for his only son.

He was only a weak, broken-down old man, with nothing strong or self-reliant in his nature. Alex Cameron of late years had been all to him : patron, employer and friend ; his only friend, indeed, for the poor old clerk had outlived the friends of his youth, and if he had any relatives living they had quite forgotten their poor broken-down kinsman.

And now that he was far down in the vale of years, his kind employer was taken from him : he was no longer fit for active work, and had laid up little or no provision for his old age.

And yet he had never been out of employment for long and had received on an average from eighty to one hundred per annum.

Therefore we suppose few could be found who would waste their sympathy on this improvident old clerk.

Still one is bound to add that as he sat there weeping over the fate of his employer, like the poor weak creature that he was, he never gave one thought to his own forlorn friendless condition.

No, no, his sole grief was for the brave, true-hearted man, stricken down in the prime of his youth, far from home and kindred.

So absorbed did he become in this heart-felt sorrow that he quite forgot all about the young lady he had left in the inner office, and in his absent-minded way, took down his hat and prepared to go out.

In turning round he observed that the door was open, then it flashed across his mind that she was still there.

He remained for a moment, undecided what to do, when she appeared at the doorway with the letter in her hand.

"I beg pardon," he stammered, "but I thought——"

"That I was about to remain all day," she interrupted, with a smile that reminded the old clerk of a ray of sunshine penetrating his gloomy office.

"This letter," she went on, still standing where the sunlight fell on her golden hair and tall graceful figure, making her look like the creation of some master painter of the olden time, glowing forth from the dark background into a glorious reality, "this letter bears a later date than the one we last received from Mr. Cameron. Would you mind my taking it with me? It shall be returned next week at the latest."

Merryman valued that letter highly. Most likely it was the last he should ever receive from his friend—but one look into her wistful eyes decided him. He gave her the letter unconditionally; he did not require it again, he said. He thought, and rightly, that ere long she would treasure up that bit of writing as the devotee treasures up some relic of her patron saint.

As she thanked him she observed how worn and sad the old clerk looked, and said kindly that she feared he felt rather lonely, sitting there all day long by himself.

"Oh, that's not it," he replied in a husky voice, his lip trembling with suppressed emotion. "I'm used to the place, and old folks like quiet—but what troubles me is, that the time may soon come when this office will be my resting place no longer; I'm getting old, young lady—Ah, yes, I'm getting old."

Tears rained down his cheek as he spoke. Lady Maud was moved with pity; she told him she was certain that Mr. Cameron would never dream of parting with such a faithful clerk, because he was growing old in his service.

"Oh, that's not it," repeated the old man. "What if he never returns and this office is closed—what then?"

Lady Maud's cheek paled. "Do not speak in that desponding way," she said quickly. "Have you served Mr. Cameron for long?"

"Some years—but that's not it. I'm not thinking of myself but——"

"You are low-spirited ; we all suffer from that at times," she said, trying to cheer him. "Well, you are not too old to work ; if ever you find yourself in want of a situation come to me and——"

"Pardon me, madam, I'm a gentleman, although I never had any proper pride," interrupted the old clerk, raising his head and pulling himself up straight. "My father was a rector, and my grandfather a dean ; I would not disgrace them by taking alms. Still I see you mean kindly, and I thank you."

"You mistake me altogether, Mr. Merryman," she replied gently ; "we, that is my mother and I, require a private secretary—I thought the post might suit you. Here is my card ; if you ever need a friend, will you please remember to write or come to me."

She shook hands with him heartily, laid her card on the shabby old desk, and was gone ere he well remembered how it all came to pass that he was once more alone.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

WHEN Lady Maud reached the Strand she walked on some distance without considering that she was alone and unattended ; indeed, she was so preoccupied that she scarce knew where she was.

The old clerk's words kept ringing in her ears, "he may never return, he may never return !" Ah, and hers was the hand that had sent him, perhaps, to his doom ! This was the burden of her thoughts as she walked unheedingly along the busy thoroughfare.

She was plainly attired, her black tweed wrap reaching nearly to the hem of her robe, yet her graceful carriage and small dainty feet, that scarcely seemed to touch the pavement as she walked, attracted many admiring eyes towards her.

Still she continued her way heedless of it all until stopped by the traffic at the corner of Wellington Street ; then she became somewhat nervous, and began to look about her for a cab, but no empty cab was in sight.

After a little hesitation she crossed over, aided by an obliging policeman, and made her way towards Covent Garden.

She had only arrived in town, from Paris, yesterday, therefore she thought a present of fruit would prove very acceptable to her mother, whom she had left at home, rather tired and worn out by her journey.

She knew her way quite well about Covent Garden, and was well known, also, by more than one fruiterer and florist as a liberal patron.

To-day she first halted at Hart's, and purchased a small sheaf of moss roses, together with a few choice bouquets, that left little change out of a five-pound note ; then on to a fruiterer's, where she selected some fruit.

Whilst standing just inside the door of the small shop, to be out of the crush of the throng, she observed a tall woman, attired in shabby mourning, looking anxiously over the choice fruit displayed at the open window. She lingered some minutes in an undecided way over a basket of peaches, but the price was apparently beyond her means, and she passed on.

Something in the appearance of this woman appeared familiar to Lady Maud ; she was certain she had met her somewhere, but she could not recall when or where.

She was still puzzling over the matter when the woman returned, and after examining the peaches once more, laid down three shillings, remarking, as she did so, that the fruit was very dear, but she must have them for her sick child, at any price. No sooner had the woman's voice fallen on her ear than Lady Maud gave a start of surprise. " Alice Mathers," she exclaimed, making a step towards the window ; but the woman did not hear her, she took up the small basket of peaches and hastened away.

Lady Maud hurried out of the shop, hoping to overtake her, but she saw Alice was already some distance ahead. Without waiting to reflect she hastened after her.

She had promised Alex Cameron to befriend Alice Mathers if ever she chanced to meet her, and it certainly behoved her to do so now, as Alice was evidently in straitened circumstances, if not in actual want. Had she not mentioned her sick child ? A chill passed over the young girl's frame. Alas ! it might be possible that she was bound to help both mother and child, for her dead brother's sake.

Although she walked quickly she found it impossible, without breaking into a run, to overtake Alice ; still she did manage to keep her tall thin figure well in sight for the length of three or four streets, when she saw her stop before the door of a shabby-looking tenement and open it with a latch-key, then disappear within, before Lady Maud could reach the house.

For an instant she contemplated ringing the bell and gaining an entrance.

Then all at once she remembered how abruptly she had left the fruiterer's shop, with her recent purchase of flowers lying carelessly on one of the hampers, and thought it best to return immediately.

She could call on Alice early on the morrow, and with that view she noted down the name of the street and number of the house in her pocket-book.

A cab came crawling down the street, on the instant, which she at once engaged.

She was quite out of her reckoning in this poor neighbourhood, and dreaded lest she should lose her way and wander into some of the dreadful haunts of crime which she had heard abounded in that locality.

She desired the cabman to set her down opposite St. Paul's Church and wait there whilst she went into the market to complete her purchases.

This was soon done, as Lady Maud never haggled over prices with tradesmen, and when she returned to the cab she was attended by the fruiterer in person well laden with fruit and flowers.

On her return home she found her mother in the same room, almost in the same attitude she had left her a few hours since. The countess gave a nervous start as her daughter entered quickly, with a servant bearing the fruit and flowers she had purchased close behind her.

The countess had been given to nervous fits and starts ever since her son's untimely death. She was sadly changed, had grown pale and thin, her glorious dark hair was streaked with silver, and her lips were pale and drawn with suffering. She started if the door opened suddenly, with an alarmed expression on her features, like one who is in constant anticipation of evil tidings. She had become averse to society and spent most of her time alone in her own room. Her calm impassive manner had left her; she was irritable and uncertain, seldom in the same mood for two hours together, and although she had lost little of her former haughtiness, she carried herself with less dignity and forbearance than formerly.

She scarcely glanced at the beautiful flowers or the choice fruit which her daughter had selected with so much care, but remarked in a querulous tone that the luncheon bell had rung ten minutes since, and she disliked to be kept waiting.

Lady Maud had thrown off her wrap in the hall ; she now followed the countess to the dining-room without taking off her bonnet, and both mother and daughter sat down to table in silence.

"I haven't the least appetite," said the countess querulously. "Put the grapes on the table, Burnet ; then go to your dinner."

When the butler and footman had left the dining-room, the countess turned to her daughter and asked her where she had been all the morning, in no very amiable tone of voice.

When Lady Maud informed her she had been to the Temple, to inquire if there had been any letters of late from Alex Cameron, a look of annoyance came into her eyes, but she made no remark, other than that a servant might have been sent on the errand ; the Temple was not a place for a young lady to be seen in alone.

Then after a pause she said, "Norland called this morning ; I'm sorry you were out when he came."

"Ah, it matters little ; I shall see him soon enough," answered Lady Maud in a tone of vexation.

"Soon enough !" echoed the countess. "What do you mean ?"

"Oh, nothing ; just what I said."

"Well, I consider that you cannot see Norland too soon ; something should be decided on at once ; the engagement has lasted quite long enough."

"Quite," answered the young lady curtly.

"I am glad to hear you say so ; of course the marriage cannot be delayed much longer."

"Norland does not appear in any hurry ; it would not be good taste on our side to display impatience."

"You are dreadfully irritating, child. Well, no matter ; we shall take care to know what this laggard in love intends to do before we leave town."

Lady Maud gave her fair shoulders a shrug by way of reply and helped herself to a peach.

"Oh, by the way," she exclaimed, suddenly remembering whom she had seen in Covent Garden Market, "I met an old friend this morning quite unexpectedly."

The countess looked a sort of languid who was it ? but remained silent.

"You remember Alice Mathers, do you not ?"

The countess gave a start like one galvanized, and stared at her daughter with eyes distended either with surprise or terror.

Still she never uttered one word, although she opened her lips slightly, and clenched her hands like one about to strike down a foe.

Lady Maud's eyes were fixed on her plate ; she did not observe the effect her words produced on her mother, so she went on to relate how she had followed Alice and had failed to overtake her. When she at length raised her eyes, the countess had recovered command over her features ; she was paler than usual, that was all.

"I noted down her address carefully," she went on, "because I intend looking her up early to-morrow morning. You have no objection to my doing so, have you, dear mamma?"

"Yes, every objection," replied the countess sternly, "and what is more, I forbid you to hold any communication with that creature ; should you meet her again avoid her as you would a viper in your path. Give me her address. As you say she looked in needy circumstances, I don't mind sending her pecuniary aid myself, spite of her base ingratitude ; but nothing would displease me more than for a daughter of mine to notice her even by a look."

Lady Maud never dared question her mother's wishes, nor disobey her commands ; she drew forth the small memorandum book and, opening it at the address she had jotted down, handed her the book in silence.

In silence also the countess turned down the leaf, cut it out with a small silver fruit knife that lay to hand, and folding up the leaf carefully, returned the memorandum book to her daughter.

Not another word was spoken on either side until the countess rose from table and prepared to leave the room ; then she remarked in a careless tone that Norland would dine with them that evening, and Fanny had promised to bring Hardbend and his younger brother to make up a family party of six.

No answer being required, Lady Maud made no reply to this communication, but she could not refrain from giving a little impatient shrug of the shoulders and slightly elevating her eye-brows.

The countess observed this with rising anger.

She fixed her eyes sternly on her daughter and said in her cold deliberate way :

"I forgot to tell you that there is something in this morning's *Times* about Alex Cameron. Perhaps, when you find that little romance of yours is ended, you will begin to act somewhat more reasonably towards Norland. You will find the paper in my morning-room, if you care to look at it."

Cold and cruel even now ; in that she was not the least changed. Yet it was pitiless, even in her, to bid her daughter go and read that the man she loved had died in a far-off land amongst strangers, and that the one romance of her life was ended.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A FEW days after Lady Maud had seen Alice Mathers in Covent Garden, she might be found sitting, diligently plying her needle, in a dingy second-floor room in Dean Street. The room was clean and orderly, although comfortless and bare. No one came to lodge in Dean Street who required luxuriously-furnished apartments.

Alice had not changed for the better since we last saw her in Alex Cameron's chambers. She was still painfully thin and pale, and her large dark eyes had lost none of their fierceness.

Freda, however, who sat listlessly in a corner with a picture book spread before her, looked faded and fragile, like a flower drooping for lack of air and light.

The thoughts of Alice as she bent over her work were by no means pleasant, if one might judge from the expression of her rigid features and tightly-compressed lips.

Whatever her thoughts may have been, however, they were suddenly interrupted by a loud knock on the door.

She looked up from her work with surprise depicted on every feature, a knock at her door was a very unusual occurrence indeed.

The knock was repeated, this time rather impatiently.

Alice rose up, and going to the door, opened it a little way cautiously.

"Ah, beg pardon, ma'am," said some one in a particularly insinuating voice. "You are the—ahem!—the lady I came to see. May I be allowed to enter?"

"You are quite a stranger to me," replied Alice bluntly, as she held the door in her hand to prevent his coming in. "May I ask the name of the person you want to see?"

"Well, formerly Mathers—Miss Alice Mathers. Pray allow me to enter ; I have something particular to say to you, ahem !—something very particular, I assure you."

Alice surveyed him carefully from head to foot. His appearance was that of a professional man carefully attired in black ; his countenance, if not pleasing, was blandly smiling, and his manner well bred, if a little too insinuating.

"I cannot remember having seen you before," said Alice, still barring his entrance. "Who desired you to call on me?"

"Ah, well, ahem! when your little girl was ill, do you remember a most kind professional gentleman who pulled her through?"

"Do you mean Doctor Sefton?" asked Alice, quite thrown off her guard.

"Ahem! yes; glad you remember kind friends."

Alice opened the door wide without further parley and invited him to enter the room.

She retained a grateful sense of the great physician's kindness; he who was sought after by the highest in the land, had bent over her child's sick bed as though she were in possession of the wealth and station that had been so cruelly withheld from her. And now in the kindness of his heart he had sent a medical man to inquire after Freda.

This was the thought of Alice, as she opened the door wide to allow the stranger to enter.

It never occurred to her to ask how Doctor Sefton had found out their present abode; naturally trustful and unsuspecting of evil intentions, she received this kindness without once suspecting it paved the way to some pitfall.

"Ahem! so this is the little one who was ill? Looks delicate—wants change—yes, wants change of air, ahem!" said the stranger taking a seat.

"Yes, sir, this is the patient Doctor Sefton was so kind to. I can never be grateful enough for the care he took of her during her illness. But why did he send you here to-day?"

"Ahem! this is one of my rounds, and Sefton is too much engaged to go far out of his way—and really, I'm glad I came; this sweet child requires care. Come here, little one." The supposed doctor held out his hand to Freda, who shrank away and eyed him distrustfully, after the manner of children when repelled instinctively by a stranger's countenance.

"Come and speak to the gentleman, Freda," said her mother, drawing her towards him; "she's timid and shy, because she's not used to see strangers."

"Ahem! yes, timid and nervous—wants change—sea air will set her up—must have change, ma'am." He took Freda's hand, felt her pulse, looked at her tongue and shook his head.

Poor Alice watched him anxiously.

"Nothing wrong, I trust? Oh, sir, pray tell me, is there anything serious the matter with my darling child?"

"Well, ahem! she must have change and plenty of nourishment; with care, ma'am, she may pick up again."

He never once looked at Alice whilst he spoke; the child appeared to absorb his entire attention.

"Circumstances will not allow me to go anywhere for a change; but care and nourishment she has never lacked," replied Alice with native dignity.

"Ahem! you don't understand me, ma'am. The sea air would be the thing to give her new life—but, ahem! you give her all she cries for like an indulgent mother. Well, that's not right; she should be dieted: brown bread, new milk, fruits—simple diet, ma'am, simple diet, that's what I mean by nourishment. But why not take her to the seaside?" This time he looked full at Alice, with a most bland expression of countenance.

"For want of means," said Alice simply. "You cannot think we have means to go where we list, when you see us living in such mean lodgings."

"But you have friends, ma'am, friends who would—ahem!—beg pardon——"

He broke off abruptly when he saw the colour rise in the pale cheeks of Alice and her eyes flash.

"But, ahem!" he resumed, rising to go, "of course I only advise what is best for the child—in fact the only remedy that will save her life—drugs are of no use—fresh air, ma'am, fresh bracing air alone will restore her to health."

The colour died out of Alice Mathers' face, the angry light in her eyes became quenched in tears. "Oh!" she exclaimed, thrown off her guard in her alarm for her child's life. "Oh, to think that the child of an earl should perish in a stifling London lodging when a breath from the ocean would give her new life!"

"Ah, that's it," said the stranger quickly. "Why should she want for anything?"

"Why?" echoed Alice passionately. "Why, because we are kept out of our own! That child is an heiress and a lady by right, and her mother is——"

"A countess," finished the stranger, again sitting down and beaming most benevolently on the excited woman.

"You say truly," replied Alice with a glow of pride. "I am the

widow of an earl, although my surroundings do not even bespeak me the gentlewoman."

"Ahem! yes, you have been wronged, madam; fearfully wronged. But we must get this young lady away for a change. When she is restored to health, your friends must rally around you and see what they can accomplish."

"Alas, I have no friends!" said Alice bitterly. "Had I even one true friend, I should not be the occupant of this mean lodging, working from early dawn until far into the night, for the barest pittance."

"Excuse me, madam, if I ask why you do not seek the aid of the law. I know an able lawyer who would soon get you placed in your rightful position, if you can only produce the proofs of your marriage." His manner was so sympathetic, and he appeared to take such a deep interest in restoring Freda to health, that Alice soon found herself confiding in this stranger as though he were the friend of years.

He remained about half-an-hour, and during that time Alice had thrown aside her reserve, and answered his leading questions as though she were telling him her history of her own free will.

When he rose to take leave he said in a friendly way:

"Well, my dear madam, our first care must be to see your daughter restored to health. A friend of mine makes the treatment of children's ailments a specialty; you must allow me to bring him with me on my next visit, as I should like to consult with him on our patient's case."

"Would Doctor Sefton come, do you think? He understands Freda's constitution; she is a shy, nervous child with strangers," replied Alice, quite under the impression that this man was the friend of Doctor Sefton, and had come to see Freda at his request.

"Well, ahem—you see, madam, chest complaints and all that sort of thing is not Doctor Sefton's specialty. We must have the best advice obtainable for this young lady." He laid his plump hand on the head of Freda in a caressing way as he spoke, but the child drew back and shivered as though struck with a sudden chill.

Alice then noticed how white his hands were, though large and clumsy, the joints dimpled like a child's and the fingers fat and stumpy; yet it was a damp flabby hand, as she felt when he shook hands with her at parting.

It was not until after he had left the room and she had time to reflect that she remembered he had not given her his name.

Was it forgetfulness, or design? she questioned, not quite satisfied with the bland, fair-spoken doctor, now that the glamour of his presence was no longer felt.

Yet how sympathetic and friendly he had seemed. So respectful and deferential, too; it was like balm to her wounded spirit to be treated with consideration and polite attention after so many years of contumely and neglect. Still, spite of all, something in his manner had left an impression on her mind that was not altogether agreeable.

A sort of doubt in his good faith and sincerity underlay all she could urge in his favour.

His motive could only be a benevolent one, she said over and over again to herself as she combated with her doubts concerning his good faith; Doctor Sefton knew she was far too poor to pay large fees, and the stranger could see that for himself, by looking at her mean surroundings.

Still she blamed herself for being so communicative about her affairs, for after all he was but a stranger; he had, however, promised to call again soon to hold a consultation over Freda's case, and when he came she determined to know his name before holding any further communication with him.

She had not long to wait, for next day, quite early in the afternoon, a knock came to her door, and as she had been rather expecting to hear that knock since noon, she opened it immediately.

"How-do, madam?" said the visitor of yesterday, shaking hands in a most effusive manner, before he had well bustled into the room. "Told you yesterday we must hold a consultation, and here we are."

The bland doctor was accompanied by two gentlemen attired in black, with a faultless display of linen of snowy whiteness. They bowed respectfully to Alice, and then looked about them for a seat. There were three or four chairs in the room, but all of them appeared rather too rickety to support such portly gentlemen.

"Pray be seated, madam," said one of them, politely placing the strongest-looking chair for her use.

Alice, taken thus by surprise, became embarrassed and quite lost her presence of mind. She sat down mechanically with Freda clinging to the skirt of her gown.

The three gentlemen drew a chair each, until they formed a sort of half-circle, then sat down facing her.

Alice had led such a secluded life for years that the novelty of the situation confused and bewildered her. She was too overpowered by the suddenness of their unexpected presence, even to think, and at first answered their questions at random.

At length it struck her as odd that their questions bore no reference whatever as to the state of Freda's health. Her sense of good-breeding came to her aid also.

Neither of these men had thought fit to give his name.

Why had not her visitor of yesterday introduced his colleagues in proper form, if they had really come for a consultation on her child's case?

She drew herself up with native dignity, and reminded the trio that as yet she was quite unaware to whom she had the honour of speaking.

"Ah—ahem—but, my dear madam, you remember me, surely? You cannot have forgotten Dr. Pounceford. I called yesterday." This was said with an air of surprise and a slight elevation of the eyebrows.

Doctor Pounceford's two friends then began to look at Alice so searchingly that she was quite at a loss for an answer, and felt more confused than before.

Their visit did not last long. In less than ten minutes they rose up to go.

"I think we are agreed," said Doctor Pounceford sententiously.

His friends nodded assent, bowed slightly to Alice, and turned to leave the room.

"But what is your opinion about my child's case?" asked Alice, addressing herself to Doctor Pounceford.

"Ahem! my dear madam, we must consult together in private before we can give an opinion on the case. I will call again to-morrow." He shook hands hastily whilst he was yet speaking, and before Alice could ask another question Doctor Pounceford and his friends had disappeared down the dark stairs, and in another instant she heard the hall door bang behind them.

To say that she was vexed and bewildered by the strangeness of their visit would give but a faint idea of the state of her mind when she sat down to reflect on what had just taken place.

On one point, however, she soon made up her mind. She decided that Doctor Pounceford should on no pretence whatever

enter her room again. She would have no more of his charity visits ; she would tell him so plainly when he called again.

It was mockery to call that afternoon's visit, with his two friends, a consultation on Freda's case. They scarcely noticed the child at all. What could this pretended consultation mean ?

It was no wonder that the strange proceedings of the medical trio occupied her mind during the rest of the day, and kept her sleepless far into the night.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ALICE waited in her room, the day after the visit of the three medical men, until late in the afternoon, expecting every instant to hear Doctor Pounceford's knock at the door.

The day wore away, however, without his putting in an appearance, and finding at length that Freda required some milk, she put on her bonnet and mantle to go and fetch it. After bidding Freda to keep as quiet as a mouse until her return, and not to move if any one knocked, nor to answer if any one called to her, she went out, locking the door behind her and taking the key.

Little as she imagined it, this was destined to be an eventful day in Alice's destiny.

She had not proceeded twenty steps on her way down Dean Street before she almost ran into the arms of Mrs. Trimbley.

" Bless me, if it ain't Alice," cried the good woman. " Oh, ain't I glad to see you, that's all ! " Then she took hold of Alice and hugged her, in the public street, like a mother who had found a long-lost child.

Alice did not return the embrace, but tried hard to disengage herself from what she considered a most ridiculous position.

" Oh, ain't I glad ! " cried Mrs. Trimbley over and over again with tears of joy raining down her cheeks. " But come along to our place with me, my dear ; yes, come along this minute. Mr. Merryman's been wanting to see you this year and more."

In some surprise Alice inquired what Mr. Cameron's clerk wanted to see her about.

" Well, something for your benefit, that's certain. I've searched London through for you myself, an' so have Gavy. Mr. Cameron left word you was to be found, an' we've been doing our best, an' wearing our lives out. But to think that I should meet you just as I wasn't looking for you, at last ! "

"Mr. Cameron desired you to find me?" cried Alice, her pale cheek flushing, her lips quivering nervously.

"Well, yes, he did—that is, he told his clerk to do so—an' we've all been looking for you, day an' night, as one may say. Why, that boy Gavy wanted a hand-organ an' a monkey to search for you an' Freda. Where is Freda? an' where have you been hiding yourself this twelve months and more?"

"I'm lodging close by," replied Alice rather distantly, "and will call on Mr. Cameron's clerk to-morrow. I'm going on an errand, so must bid you good day——"

"Oh, but you won't! You really must come with me," cried Mrs. Trimble all in a breath and keeping fast hold of Alice.

"I really cannot go with you," she replied coldly. "The message Mr. Cameron left for me has kept a long time—it will take no harm for another day. I have left Freda quite alone, and must hurry back to her at once."

It was impossible, say what she might, to shake Mrs. Trimble off, so at last Alice consented to take her to her room, and they went together, Mrs. Trimble keeping fast hold of her hand as though she feared to lose her in the crowd.

It was quite affecting to see Freda rush into Mrs. Trimble's motherly arms, the moment the good woman entered the room, and cling around her neck, uttering her fond childish endearments as of old.

"Heaven bless the dear child!" cried Mrs. Trimble, wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron. "My heart's been empty ever since you left your mammy, my precious, an' now it's just too full to speak."

When she had calmed down a little she once more urged Alice to go immediately to Mr. Cameron's chambers. "I'm sure what the clerk has got to tell you, you'll be right glad to know; I has my own ideas on the subject," went on the good woman, quite ignoring Alice's evident wish to get rid of her as soon as possible. "What I've always said is that you are a much-wronged woman, my dear, there's no doubt of that. Well, now, suppose he did repent at last? 'tis my opinion that he did, an' left something handsome to you an' Freda."

"Do you mean by '*he*' my late husband?" asked Alice in her most cutting manner.

"Well, my dear, I know you'd reason to think him your hus-

band, an' you've been as true an' faithful to him as though he was that same, so do take my advice—an' 'tis the advice of one who never wished you wrong—you go to Elm Court this very afternoon ; go at once or you will be too late ; the old clerk never stays there after five o'clock, by any chance."

Mrs. Trimble became so persistent in her entreaties that Alice at last consented to go, provided Mrs. Trimble would remain and look after Freda until her return.

This the kind-hearted woman gladly consented to do, and rather unwillingly Alice at length departed.

Her expectations were not raised very high by what Mrs. Trimble had told her: a sum of money, or an annuity at best. Well, better that than slow starvation in a mean London lodging ; if it were but enough to take Freda to the seaside, and provide her with the little dainties her delicate appetite craved for, she would accept the legacy and waive all else.

Still it was in no very hopeful state of mind that she reached Elm Court and mounted the stair leading to Alex Cameron's chambers.

She knocked impatiently at the outer door and, without waiting for permission, opened it and entered.

The clerk looked up from his desk at this sudden intrusion, and quite started when he saw a tall gaunt woman staring at him defiantly ; at least that was his impression at a first glance.

Without any preliminary introduction Alice asked him rather abruptly if Mr. Cameron had left any message with him for her.

The old man rose up and looked at her searchingly, then shook his head with a sigh. Who could this wild, defiant-looking woman be ? She was not his sister's pretty daughter Alice, certainly. He had grown cautious also, since that mysterious visit of Lady Chineron to the inner chambers, so he replied drily :

"My good lady, you should remember that you are quite a stranger to me ; we lawyers are not in the habit of receiving strangers without some sort of an introduction."

"Oh, ah ! introduction ; well, I really don't know by what name to announce myself," she said bitterly ; she always felt bitter when the question of her name arose. "You haven't forgotten the tragedy that was once enacted in that inner room yet, have you ?"

"Heaven defend us !" exclaimed the old clerk with a shudder ; "that is a thing which still haunts me. Hist !" he continued, drawing near her and apparently forgetting in his excitement

that she was a perfect stranger to him, "Hist! I sometimes see, or dream I see, him open that door and beckon me towards him!"

The woman turned her face towards the door as he spoke, and grew a shade paler if that were possible; at any rate her lips lost every particle of colour.

"Well, it's no wonder he should haunt the place!" she said with a shudder. "The thought of his widow and child on the point of starvation may well trouble him, even in the family vault where they laid him to rest."

The old man trembled and looked at her searchingly once more, then he again asked her for her name.

"Oh, you will not find my name in the peerage," she replied with a cold sneer, "although I am the widow of a peer, and my father was for many years vicar of——"

"Was your father's name Mathers?" interrupted the old clerk excitedly.

"Yes, his name was Mathers and my name is Alice. Did you know my father?"

"Gracious goodness, surely you cannot be my sister's daughter!" cried the old clerk, peering into her worn face with glistening eyes.

"And you?—is your name Horace Merryman?" she asked, grasping his hand, with a look in her eyes that changed their hard pitiless expression as if by magic.

A cloud gathered over the old clerk's brow; although he had sought her so earnestly and would willingly share his last crust with her, yet he could not forget that he had heard her name coupled with shame, and she it was whose lightness had broken his much-loved sister's heart.

The loving light died out of Alice's eyes, the old bitter smile curled her lips once more. "Ah! you too turn against me! Why should my wrongs harden your heart towards me?"

"Heaven forbid! but if you are really the widow of Lord Chineron, why do you not claim your rank and your child's legal heritage?"

"Do not turn from me!" she entreated. "You know the law; you can help me. Except you I have not one friend in the world."

"I will never desert you, Alice; but I wish to heaven you had married some one in your own rank. I hope, at any rate, you have been left something to keep you from want; the world deals hardly with a woman who has to earn her bread. There's a

packet left for you in my charge by Mr. Cameron ; we had better examine the contents at once."

The old man arose and went to unbolt and unlock the inner office door.

He sighed deeply, more than once, as his trembling hands undid the fastenings. "Alas, how sadly my dream is ended!" he whispered under his breath. He had pictured to himself a gentle womanly creature, with bowed head and plaintive air, to whom he would hold forth a protecting hand, and whose life it would be his duty to brighten and cheer.

But this woman! this dark revengeful creature ; she would repel his love and stand aloof from his feeble offers of protecting care. Alas, for Alice! Her wrongs had made her quite unwomanly ; it was her fate to repel, not to excite pity, much less sympathy. Although Horace Merryman was the kindest and best-hearted of men, he found it impossible to welcome this woman, as he would like to have welcomed the daughter of his dead sister. He could not have this woman to cheer his hearth in his declining years ; he felt instinctively that she would rather darken the hearth, and render the home cheerless, of any man fated to spend his days with her. The shadow that cast a gloom over her life would keep the sunshine out of any home she might inhabit.

These and many other thoughts passed through the old clerk's mind before he returned from the inner office, bearing a small sealed packet in his hands.

Alice sprang from her seat and looked eagerly at him.

"Is it for me?" she cried breathlessly.

He did not speak, but held it towards her, then going to his usual seat, he sat down and bowed his head on his hands, as he leant forward on his office desk. He shrank from seeing her rage, if the contents of that packet should disappoint her expectations.

Suddenly he started and looked up, aroused out of his short reverie by a wild, hysterical cry.

Alice was holding a narrow slip of paper in her hand and crying like an excited child.

"Oh, don't," ejaculated the old man, quite frightened by her excited looks. "Pray be calm. What is the matter?"

"Look!" she cried wildly. "Look—that bit of paper lifts the shadow from my life and the cloud of shame from my brow—look!"

When Mr. Merryman did look at that slip of paper, and found

that it was nothing less than her marriage certificate, and proved beyond question that Alice Mathers had been legally married to George Bathwick Chineron, he laughed and wept in a breath, behaving, in a subdued way, almost as wildly as Alice herself.

"I must hasten and fetch Freda—nay, she shall be Lady Alfreda from henceforth. Heavens, to think that the daughter of an earl should be obliged to pass for years as the child of a gate porter! But I will be avenged on that proud, cruel countess. Yes, yes, I will mete her out measure for measure, until I bow her haughty head to the dust!"

She looked so dark and vengeful with her pale face and flashing eyes, so like a Nemesis of unappeasable wrath, that the old clerk shuddered and drew back.

The first ebullition of surprise over, he began to reflect that rank and fortune had come too late to Alice to make her either happy or amiable.

Poor Alice, she had brooded over her wrongs for so many weary years that she could not help rejoicing when at length the power was in her hand to repay her wrongs with interest.

As soon as she recovered some degree of composure she became anxious about Freda, and having secured the pocket-book with its precious contents about her person, she set off with all haste towards her lodging.

When she arrived within a few yards of her own street door she noticed that a knot of people were gathered around it, and a cab was in waiting outside.

With a quick presentiment of evil she dashed forward, to find a strange woman pulling Freda, who was terrified and crying for help, towards the cab.

With a bound resembling that of a lioness, Alice sprang on the woman and released the child from her grasp.

There was a shout from the crowd and some commotion, but Alice did not heed it. She did the wisest thing possible under the circumstances: she took up Freda in her arms and bore her away, without casting one look at the woman, whom she had flung prostrate on the pavement.

At the end of the street, observing that she was followed by some dozen women and boys, she hailed a passing hansom and was driven with all speed towards the Strand.

(To be continued.)

Old-Fashioned Railway Travelling.

WE are all of us, of course, well aware that railway travelling was at one time very different from what it is now, but how different it was few save those who were old enough fifty or sixty years ago to take an intelligent and observant interest in it, have any accurate knowledge. To recall some of the peculiarities of railway travelling in those far-away times will therefore, it is hoped, in these days of universal movement, be of interest to a good many readers.

It is not, perhaps, surprising that the old stage-coach system was copied in many respects by the pioneers of the new mode of travelling. It is difficult indeed to break entirely with tradition, and it required a little experience to show how radically different the two things were. That railway travelling was but an improved method of stage-coaching, instead of being something essentially different, seems to have been the generally accepted idea at first. For several years, on the Stockton and Darlington Railway, old stage-coach bodies, placed upon railway axles and wheels, were drawn by horses ; or sometimes by the rather slower beam-action locomotives of that extremely primitive line.

When the Liverpool and Manchester opened in 1830, its first-class coaches were simply developments of those just mentioned being made to resemble three stage-coach bodies on one frame. The outside seats were there, the outside lamps, and all the rest of it. The passenger had to see his luggage hauled on to the roof, and at the journey's end had to be careful lest he should be knocked over by a portmanteau sliding down a steep board on to the platform. The windows were so small it was impossible to get a good view from them ; in fact, it was not always that you had any windows to look out of. Even second-class coaches at one time had merely a light roof or covering over them, the sides being quite open, so that the rush of air and the dust and cinders compelled the passengers to keep their eyes shut a good deal of the journey. There were usually seats on the roof of each coach, at the

ends, where one or two passengers could sit if they preferred to do so. In fine weather it was not so bad when running down-hill with little or no steam on, but under ordinary circumstances the ashes from the engine made it very unpleasant. A special kind of spectacles or goggles of fine wire gauze was made for the particular use and benefit of outside passengers, though indeed the inside ones often required them nearly as much. Armed with a pair of these the bold outside passenger could enjoy the view very well, if his time was not entirely occupied in holding his hat on or clutching the little rail on each side of the seat to prevent himself being jerked off his perch by the lively movements of the little 3 or 4 ton band-box beneath him.

At first the guards invariably rode outside, the under guard on the first coach, with his back to the engine ; the head guard, facing forwards, upon the last coach. They were supposed to make various gesticulations and signals to each other from time to time, with reference to things in general being all right with the train. They each had a brake to work when necessary, but the increasing speed of the travelling soon rendered the outside places more than flesh and blood could bear. Some instances of the guard getting nearly frozen to death having occurred, he was provided with a vehicle having a sort of projecting open box behind it, into which he could step from the covered portion of the van when he could spare a few minutes from the rather miscellaneous duties peculiar to railway guards. If a useful individual, the guard was certainly an ornamental one as well. On the Manchester and Leeds Railway it is recorded in 1840 that "the guards are dressed in flaming red coats and carry horns," whilst a little later the London and South Western guards' uniform was a blue coat with a scarlet collar and blue trousers with a red stripe down the seam.

The railway companies did not look upon refreshment-rooms at first with much favour, being afraid that the facilities for obtaining drink by their servants would lead to accidents. It is true that the Swindon and Wolverton refreshment-rooms dated from the opening of their respective lines, but there were none at the termini. People were expected to get what they wanted in the town before setting out on their journey. At some places a woman was allowed to retail biscuits and fruit, or other articles of an equally comforting and sustaining nature, from a

stall in the waiting room, but nothing more conducive to collisions than lemonade could be obtained on the company's premises by thirsty engine-drivers, or passengers choked with dust from outside travelling.

The fares were based, like so many other things in early railway administration, upon the stage-coach system, which was a very costly mode of getting about. Certainly, they were less than the coaches charged, if only for the sake of running the latter off the road, but they were far higher than at present. As an example, the first-class single fare from Euston to Birmingham was at one time thirty-two shillings and sixpence, only one shilling less than the first class *return* fare is now. This is perhaps an extreme case, and on some lines they have not been lowered so much as on others ; but it is well within the mark to say that railway fares were fifty per cent. higher at first than they are now. The advantages of the rail over the road were appraised by the travellers of those days at "three times the speed for half the money," which, no doubt, when the saving of tips to coachmen and guards and of many hotel bills was taken into consideration, was not far from the truth. It was not unusual to charge higher fares for night travelling than for day, second-class coaches completely covered in and sheltered being provided instead of the dreadful open-sided ones used in the day time ; five shillings extra was charged from London to Birmingham, second class, by night, making twenty-five shillings, exactly the present "second return." No cushions or linings were provided ; a man of average height could not stand upright in the vehicle even with his hat off. People used to indulge in many ingenious speculations as to where on earth the directors obtained the extraordinarily hard wood of which the second-class seats were made. It has been said that to the Brighton Company belongs the credit of having first padded the seats of second-class coaches. The name of the still greater benefactor to humanity who did the same for the third-class seems rather uncertain.

But if the second-class passenger had literally a hard time of it, he of the third, on the short lines at any rate, often had no seat at all. Such an absurdity as a roof over his head was of course equally out of the question. The Cheap Trains Act of 1844 altered all that ; but the principle of trying to make people go in higher classes than they could afford by making the others uncomfort-

able, was the foundation-stone of English railway policy for a very long time.

The undisguised wonder and admiration of the early railway writers at things which appear now most common-place, is quite refreshing in these highly-educated times when everybody knows all about everything. In an account of the Grand Junction (Birmingham to Liverpool and Manchester) Railway, written the year after its opening, the first thing the chronicler saw at the "station house" was from "ten to twenty enormous and handsomely-built carriages." As none of these vehicles contained more than three of the very smallest compartments, or was more than a foot or two longer than a horse-box is now; somewhat narrower and by no means so high, the expression "enormous" is rather amusing.

The engines seem to have impressed our friend of 1838 still more deeply. "One of them moves slowly towards you. The huge creature bellows at first like an elephant. Deep, slow and terrific are the hoarse heavings that it makes. There it is, roaring, groaning and grunting like a sea-horse, and spouting up steam like a whale." Having got over his wholesome dread of the "huge creature," and taken his seat outside one of the coaches, the writer falls into some more of his wonderful comparisons. "The engine before you seems to be some extraordinary animal which, with the swiftness of the eagle, has the power of impelling itself forward at a prodigious rate, while it hurls the world away behind it."

The Grand Junction engines, which aroused such contrary emotions in the breast of this gentleman, were little six-wheeled machines weighing from 12 to 14 tons in working order. They had "single" driving-wheels, some 5 feet, others $5\frac{1}{2}$ feet, in diameter, and cylinders $12\frac{1}{2}$ and 13 inches bore, with 18 inches stroke. The classical mythology was largely drawn upon to furnish their names, with a little assistance from Shakespeare. They were worked at pressures of steam varying from 50 to 60 lbs. on the square inch, and had small four-wheeled tenders of peculiar appearance, bearing the letters G.J.R.W. on their sides.

The sight of an in-coming train seems to put a climax to the excitable feelings of the writer just quoted. "The order and regularity, the dignity and importance of the train, give the

whole matter an air of national grandeur. Every carriage seems a royal *cortège*, every passenger a person of distinction."

In the early days of railways, serious scruples were entertained by many worthy people on the subject of Sunday travelling. Although they ran none but the mail trains on that day, some of the Grand Junction shareholders seem to have gone so far as to refuse such portion of their dividends as might be due to Sunday traffic, for the directors, in their first half-yearly report (December 31, 1837), state that "the nett profit for Sunday travelling amounts to six shillings per share, and the directors recommend to the proprietors that any shareholder who may refuse to receive it should be required to relinquish all claims to it afterwards, in order that it may be appropriated to charitable purposes." At any rate, these conscientious Sabbatarians may be credited with having the courage of their convictions.

One of the greatest difficulties the pioneers of railway travelling had to contend with, was the notion that it was unhealthy, and the obloquy thrown upon the new system by those interested in the old largely took the form of most reckless assertions to that effect. Horrible tales were circulated of the chilly damp of the tunnels and cuttings, and the lung and chest complaints it would cause. It was conclusively proved that the rapid motion would cause apoplexy. People's eyesight would be destroyed by things moving so quickly before them; nay, they would, not even be able to breathe when going at such "an unheard-of velocity" as twenty miles an hour. Even more absurd reasons were advanced in opposition to railways. It was seriously asserted that all the iron in the country would be insufficient to supply them, and that consequently there would be none left for ordinary purposes. The iron rails would attract lightning, and render the climate so stormy that England would hardly be habitable. Experience of course soon disproved all this nonsense, and much more; people rushed into the opposite extreme, and from putting every obstacle in the way of the railway-makers, wanted to have lines connecting almost every village and hamlet in the country.

It is the custom now-a-days to consider a locomotive as decidedly indispensable to railway travelling; but it was not always so. Here and there, for short distances, a train did without one very well. Whether a traveller went from London to

Liverpool, or from Liverpool to London, he began and ended his journey without the aid of a locomotive. Instead of it, a slow-moving and dignified beam-engine dragged the train up-hill for about a mile with a strong rope running over little rollers laid between the rails. The rope went up one line and down the other, passing over a large drum at the engine-house, at the top of the incline, and round a horizontal wheel at the bottom. Trains coming down were regulated by hand-brakes for control over them, but the force of gravity was their only motive power.

On the London and Blackwall line the trains were pulled to and fro with wire ropes, by stationary engines fixed at each end of the line. It is level, only three and a half miles long, and was worked thus for fear of sparks setting fire to the warehouses and other property near it.

At Euston, where for some ten years locomotives were never seen, the porters used to push the trains out of the station and for a few yards beyond, till the first coach reached the hook of the big rope. The procession then sailed away at about ten miles an hour up to Camden Town, from which place a quaint little four-wheeled engine would take it on to Birmingham. Upon the Bolton and Leigh Railway, a feeder of George Stephenson's Liverpool and Manchester line, not only the trains, but their locomotives as well, were pulled up hill with a rope in this rather humiliating fashion. The first mile from Bolton was worked by horse-power, and as no less than three different systems of traction were thus employed upon hardly ten miles of line, the trains certainly did pretty well in going at an average rate of fourteen and a half miles per hour. By the way, one of the old Rainhill heroes, Hackworth's engine, "Sanspareil," which but for the misfortune of a cracked cylinder would not improbably have beaten Stephenson's "Rocket" at the locomotive trials, worked for many years upon the Bolton and Leigh Railway. It now rests from its labours side by side with its quondam rival in the peaceful seclusion of the Patent Office Museum at South Kensington.

In days when railway speed was a new experience people took much more interest in the rate at which they travelled than they do now; and one of the very earliest Bradshaws contains a table showing the rate of travelling per hour, elaborately made out for all rates of speed from *one mile an hour* to *four hundred*. To ascertain the speed you had only to count the number of seconds

occupied in passing between two consecutive quarter-mile posts. As the table goes into halves and quarters of seconds, it was never of any great use, and one can only hope that the four hundred miles an hour traveller of the future will find it serviceable. Another authority goes into this important matter, as it seems to have been considered, in a most scientific manner. Ascertain, he says, the diameter of the driving-wheels of the engine, and then proceed to count the number of fourth puffs in every ten and three-quarter seconds. If, however, the driving-wheels were not five feet, but five feet six inches, you counted every fourth puff in twelve seconds. Perhaps the outside passengers, and those journeying in open vehicles, were better placed for hearing the "beat" of the engine than travellers now are; at any rate it will be conceded, no doubt, that this interesting pastime was well calculated to relieve the tedium of railway travelling.

An important figure upon the rail in old times was the "policeman." This worthy combined many important offices in his own person. He was ticket collector, he was signalman, he was gate-keeper at the level crossing, he showed the first-class passengers into their numbered seats in the train. Being sworn-in as a constable, he carried handcuffs in the pockets of his swallow-tailed coat, and was often provided with a truncheon and rattle as well. A top-hat of massive construction protected his head, a stiff leather stock made him hold his head up, and a pair of straps compelled his white canvas trousers to assume the rigidity of outline then considered so highly desirable. It was suggested, though we do not know whether it was ever carried out, that the policemen stationed at the booking-offices and gates of the principal stations should be armed with brass-tipped staves, five feet in length. The British public of those days was by no means so peaceable and law-abiding as it now usually is. Calling out the military and swearing-in special constables were not by any means rare events, whilst the establishment of a regular police force in London and elsewhere was then so new an experiment that the railway companies doubtless thought it safer to rely for the protection of their property upon their own men than upon the raw and highly unpopular "Peeler" of the time.

The way in which the railways were regarded as sights and

shows, not simply as objects of public utility and convenience, seems very curious. For several years the Lime Street tunnel was one of the "lions" of Liverpool. It was whitewashed throughout, lighted with gas, and the names of the streets and buildings above were painted here and there for the information of travellers. An innkeeper at Camden Town, in 1838, "begs to inform his numerous friends and the public that he has appropriated the roof of his house for the use of his visitors, from which they will have an extensive view of the London and Birmingham Railway and of the metropolis, from fifteen to twenty miles round." As to the Greenwich Railway, which was the first line opened in London, it was "constructed in a form which will render it, as a work of art, one of the wonders of the metropolis." At the Deptford Station a wonderful sort of torpedo, called the Scorpion, eighty feet long, invented by Lord Dundonald, was shown as an attraction to travellers. The line runs from end to end upon arches, which no doubt rendered it "a work of art," and, like the neighbouring Croydon line, had a row of gas-lamps at each side like a street.

The managing director of the Greenwich Railway used to drive to Deptford Station, and having taken his seat in the train, the bugler who accompanied it played "See, the Conquering Hero Comes" until the journey's end. There was indeed a good deal of music in connection with the railways some fifty years ago or more. The opening of a new line was always celebrated with a prodigious amount of it, whilst at more places than one a brass band was employed for a time to play the trains in and out of the station. Possibly the bandsmen would soon get rather tired if this singular custom still obtained at some of the modern termini, but all that was changed a long while ago, and sense has replaced sentiment, to the total exclusion of the latter from railway management.

The intending passenger of fifty years ago was not always obliged to take his choice between first, second and third classes, for some lines used a fourth class in addition, as in fact was done in Scotland occasionally in quite recent times. As to what these fourth-class coaches were like, they had neither seats nor roofs, unless, under the Cheap Trains Act of 1844, the parliamentary fare of one penny per mile was charged by them, the ordinary third-class charge of about three half-pence being made by one

or two other trains in the day. The Midland, in 1845, had a fourth-class train, which took one hour and a quarter in going from Nottingham to Derby, a distance of sixteen miles.

The Manchester and Leeds (now part of the Lancashire and Yorkshire) also employed a fourth class at a penny a mile, by one train each way daily, passengers of all the other three classes being conveyed by the same train. This company made a bold bid for a share of the London and Manchester traffic by booking passengers to the metropolis *viâ* Hull, the fare including, besides the railway and steamer, omnibus to the Hunt's Bank Station at Manchester. As the through fare was only thirteen shillings and sixpence, four shillings less than the penny a mile rate by the direct line through Birmingham, it is to be hoped that such enterprise met with a due reward. The journey could hardly have taken less than thirty-six hours, so that the economy was more apparent than real. The parliamentary trains between London and Manchester *viâ* Newton Junction took about fifteen hours to cover two hundred and ten miles, but out of this half-an-hour was allowed for refreshments and changing trains at Birmingham. The "wagon passengers," as they were often called, were shunted into sidings unmercifully to let the more aristocratic trains pass; in fact, a north-country porter was once heard to reply to a remonstrance from some of these poor creatures, tired of waiting *locked-up* in their crowded and dirty dens, "Ye mun bide till yer betters gaw past; ye're only the nigger train."

At one time the railway companies regarded smoking with particular animosity. They considered it an accursed thing altogether and would have none of it, on any consideration. One of the principal lines gave notice that "smoking would not be allowed in the station-houses or in any of the coaches, even with the consent of the passengers." It is said that Lord Palmerston was once smoking a cigar at a railway station in the days of this prohibitive *régime*, when he was reminded by an official that he was transgressing the company's regulations. As he took not the slightest notice of the intimation, the official snatched the cigar from his lips, threw it on the ground and trampled upon it. Palmerston, admiring the man's stern performance of his duty, made inquiries about him, and used his influence to get him promoted to a higher and more lucrative position on the line

Fear of fire, however, rather than any abstract objection to the use of tobacco, seems to have been the chief motive of the severe rules against smoking, rules which it is unnecessary to say largely defeated their own object.

Nor were smokers and third-class passengers the only persons to whom railway travelling was made unpleasant. The dons of Cambridge, afraid lest the good young men committed to their charge should run off to London or some such wicked place by the "new rail-road," had a clause inserted in the Eastern Counties Railway Act, giving them power to search the trains and stations for undergraduates of wandering tendencies, and also requiring the company's servants to give information, if called upon, as to the movements of such offenders. However, these ordinances, by their absurd severity, failed even more completely than the smoking regulations, remaining indeed a dead letter from the very first.

For several years, upon many lines, passengers' tickets were printed slips of paper torn out of a book. The necessary details being filled in with pen and ink in a most tedious and exasperating manner, the document was handed to you over an open counter like that of a shop. Return tickets did not come into general use for a long time and were often called "double-tickets," perhaps because the fares were, at first, usually double the single rate.

In the old times railway companies did not think of owning steamers, docks, hotels and what not, as they do now. There were a few steamboat services in connection with the trains at various places, but they were worked by independent parties. One of the first services of this kind was between Shoreham and Dieppe; the boats, which left only every other day, belonging to the General Steam Navigation Company. They started from the railway terminus at the Kingston Wharf, in Shoreham Harbour, and called, half-an-hour later (weather permitting and during daylight only), at Brighton Chain Pier. From Dieppe the passengers went by diligence to Rouen, whence they took the newly-opened railway to Paris, arriving there, if all went well, in something under twenty-four hours from leaving London by the Brighton Railway. You could also go in 1845 from Shoreham to Havre once a week, and from there to Rouen, either by diligence or up the Seine in a

small steamer. These Shoreham boats ran for several years, till the railway company commenced a service of its own from Littlehampton, which in its turn has disappeared in favour of the Newhaven route. People were booked through from London to Paris, but the fares were about double what they are now and the accommodation very inferior. There was a limited tidal service daily between Dover and Boulogne, but London was the great point of departure for the Continent, and continued to be so for the first fifteen or twenty years of the railway era.

In the thirties and early forties the practice of naming the coaches, instead of numbering them, prevailed on some lines, but it soon went out of fashion. The names were such as the stage-coaches usually bore: "Greyhound," "Delight," "Traveller," "Harlequin," "The Times," "The Globe," "Wellington," "Victory," for example, were the names of some of the Liverpool and Manchester railway carriages about the year 1836, but as the number of vehicles increased the names were given up. The system emigrated to America, whence it returned to its native land, after fully thirty years' absence, with the Pullman cars for the Midland Railway. The latter company is gradually taking to the more business-like numbers instead, but, elsewhere, railway managers seem to think a name as necessary to a Pullman as their predecessors did half a century back for the little coaches of the Grand Junction or Liverpool and Manchester lines. The names had peculiar inconveniences, sometimes of a kind which no one would now think of. It is said that when Napoleon's old general, Soult, was in England in 1838 and making a tour to Liverpool and other large towns, the railway authorities were horrified at finding, after his train had started, that the gallant marshal was in a coach bearing the ill-omened name of Waterloo! He was taken ten and three-quarter miles in ten minutes in part of the run, so it is to be hoped he forgot the affair in admiration of what his hosts could do in the way of travelling.

Many stations were familiar to railway travellers forty or fifty years ago, the names of which are now nearly forgotten. How many South Eastern passengers know the name of Bricklayers' Arms Station, now the chief London goods depôt, but for many years a passenger terminus? At one time nobody ever went to Dover or Brighton without stopping at Redhill, or Reigate as it

was called ; yet no Dover train ever goes within miles of it now, and you might travel between London and Brighton a long time by the fast trains without discovering the place. On the London and North Western, the "first-class station" at Tring, where the expresses used to stop, and Wolverton, with its great refreshment-rooms, sacred to pork-pies and boiling coffee, are almost unknown. The Great Western passenger who rushes through Didcot in the "Dutchman" or the "Zulu," little recks that faster trains than any now running once regularly called there ; the fifty-three miles from town having often been run, at the time of the "battle of the gauges," in from forty-seven to fifty minutes.

On the whole we have great reason to be proud of our railways and what they have done for us ; the words of the shrewd Quaker, Mr. Edward Pease, who established the Stockton and Darlington Railway seventy years ago, have been amply fulfilled. "Let the country," said he, "but make the railways and the railways will make the country." Most of the progress made has been effected by the healthy stimulus of competition alone, and although in some parts of the country we could do with a little more of it even now, there seems no reason to suppose that the English lines will not advance in efficiency and prosperity as much in the future as they have done in the past, or that they will not continue to play a leading part in the well-being of the land of their birth.

W. B. PALEY.

Clare.

I.

RIVERSMEAD had been in the possession of the Dormer family for many generations : a fine estate and one that its successive owners had taken every care of. There had been no profligates or spendthrifts amongst the Dormers, to waste the revenues or diminish the acres : a respectable and respected family always.

John Dormer was but three-and-twenty when he succeeded his father. An only son and, from having been delicate as a lad, without a profession, he married very soon after his father's death and settled down on his estate, devoting himself much to county and magisterial business. A few years later he entered Parliament as Conservative member for his county and had held his seat undisputed ever since. An upright, honourable and excellent man, but having few weaknesses himself, rather inclined to be somewhat intolerant with those who were not equally well balanced ; an intolerance that leaned towards hardness as he grew older, and that made him more respected than loved.

Mrs. Dormer was charming. A lovely girl of eighteen when she married, years only seemed to add to her beauty, and at forty-five she looked quite fifteen years younger. It was difficult to believe she could possibly be the mother of the fine stalwart sons and well-grown daughters, who all adored her, and regarded her as their best friend and most cherished companion. She was clever, accomplished, kind-hearted and generous, charitable in word and deed and endowed with a never-failing tact. What wonder that Mrs. Dormer was the most popular woman in the county ; and her house considered one of the pleasantest in London.

The Dormers were a large family : Ernest, the eldest son, in the Guards ; Dorothea and Olive, twin-daughters ; Gerald at Oxford, Frank at Eton, Clare, who had just been presented, Helen, Jack and Ruby, the three latter still in the school-room. They were all healthy, handsome, bright young people, not one of whom had ever caused their parents any anxiety or unhappiness.

Fairleigh was only three miles from Riversmead, and consequently the Græmes, to whom it belonged, were the Dormers' nearest neighbours. Lord George Græme, a younger son of the Duke of Ben Lomond, had, in the time of John Dormer's father, married Miss Leigh, the heiress of Fairleigh, and their son Malcolm had inherited the property from his mother. He was a handsome, dashing young fellow, and had begun life in the army, but soon tiring of the monotony and irksome restraint of soldiering in times of peace, sold out and spent several years travelling abroad in pursuit of big game, going to many (in those days) little known regions for this purpose. Then he returned home, and hunted the hounds in his own country and married a bright little Irish girl, the Lady Geraldine O'Brien, daughter of the Earl of Killarney; "a penniless lass, wi' a lang pedigree." A son was born to them, and then one sad December day, poor Malcolm Græme was carried home dead from the hunting field, to which he had ridden out so gaily in the morning.

Poor little Lady Geraldine, only twenty and a widow! Her baby son was scarce three months old. It was indeed a tragedy. Her widows' weeds were still new when people began to wonder how soon the bright, attractive little woman would marry again, and who would be poor Malcolm Græme's successor; but she disappointed all expectations on this score, remaining faithful to the memory of the husband whom she had adored, and been adored by, during their too short married life, and devoting herself with all her impulsive and affectionate nature to her boy, who, truth to tell, she spoilt most terribly.

Mrs. Dormer and Lady Geraldine were firm friends; they had many tastes in common, and in her widowhood the latter found much help and kindness at Riversmead. In all business matters Mr. Dormer was both able and willing to advise her, and in his wife she found comfort and help in many ways. The children too were fond of the little fatherless Willie, and Lady Geraldine was always glad that he should have the young Dormers as playfellows.

"Helen," said Lady Geraldine, as she entered Mrs. Dormer's pretty morning-room, one warm August day, some nine years after Malcolm Græme's death, "I've come as usual to ask a favour—*do* be kind and grant it. Dr. Newton thinks I want a breath of fresh air, so says I must go to the sea-side for a month

or six weeks, and I want you to lend me a child to go too. Willie will be so dull alone, without any playfellows, so do let me take one of your chicks with us."

"My dear Geraldine, I shall be delighted ; do you want a boy, or would Clare do ?"

"Clare, by all means ; your boys are all older than Willie, and I am sure he and Clare will get on splendidly."

"That is charming ; Clare has been looking a little pale, and I longed to send her to the sea, but it is difficult to arrange for *one*, when so many have to be considered."

Thus it was arranged. Clare Dormer went to the sea-side with Willie and his mother. It was a time of enchantment to the two children ; the sands, the shells, all delighted them, they were capital companions ; Clare a little old for her age, Willie a little young for his. She was almost motherly to the boy, who was in reality only one year younger than herself, and he looked up to her with deep admiration, and from this time dated a friendship that never decreased, but seemed to grow stronger as they grew older. Clare was a sedate little girl, with a very clear sense of right and wrong ; Willie, a perfect butterfly, inheriting his father's restlessness and dislike of restraint and much of his mother's warm-hearted Irish impulsiveness.

When Willie Græme was old enough to go to school, his troubles began. He was handsome, winning, generous and quick—but alas ! terribly idle and wayward, impatient of control, and only too easily led into any mischief ; he had far too much pocket-money and spent it freely, which no doubt helped to make him popular with his companions, but often brought him into trouble with the masters. As to lessons he hated them—all except music, for that he had a really natural taste, and seemed to learn without any trouble ; in games he excelled, being quick of eye and hand, active and strong.

In the holidays Lady Geraldine continued to spoil her boy more than ever—he did what he pleased—she could not bear to deny him anything ; he was so winning, so handsome, so affectionate, and her only one. He repaid her with the warmest love, and she never found fault or blamed him for anything. It was sadly injudicious training for one of Willie's disposition, and Mrs. Dormer often sighed as she thought how hard he would find the battle of life after a boyhood and youth of such indulgence.

Clare was still his friend and confidante, and she often gently remonstrated with him on his careless ways, and lamented the many scrapes he got into. He took her chiding most amiably, always promising to try and do better for the future: "But you don't know the temptations one has at school, Clare; if I were with *you* always, I should always be good," he would say.

At eighteen Willie went to Oxford. He had been only one term there when his mother died. Lady Geraldine had never been strong, and for the last few years seemed to grow gradually weaker and more fragile, but the lad had never realized the possibility of losing her, and the end was a great shock. He was overwhelmed with sorrow, and torn with remorse for all the trouble and anxiety she had suffered on his account, and freely poured out all his grief both to Mrs. Dormer and to Clare. Clare was nineteen at this time, a very lovely, charming girl, gentle and refined. She had been presented and spent one season in London. Her twin elder sisters had both made brilliant marriages, and Clare was as much admired as they had been. She had had two very good offers, but gently and firmly declined both, and neither Mr. nor Mrs. Dormer cared to press her in the matter. It never occurred to them that the old friendship for Willie Græme had anything to do with these refusals, and even Clare herself did not realize how the image of her dearly-loved old playfellow and still friend came between her and all other men.

Lady Geraldine's only brother came to Fairleigh for his sister's funeral, and Willie spent a few sad days with him there before returning to Oxford. When the long vacation arrived Willie went abroad with a friend. He wrote to Clare, saying he could not come home to face the sad blank, and though not seeing him was a great disappointment, she felt his disinclination was only natural.

Frank Dormer, the third of the Riversmead boys, was at Oxford also, but at a different college to Willie. He was a grave, studious lad, rather a prig, and so they had never had much in common. Two or three times, in writing home after the long vacation, he mentioned Willie, and Mrs. Dormer sighed sadly as she read, "Græme is in a very fast set. I see very little of him, but hear a good deal;" or, "Every one is talking of Græme's extravagance," or other sentences of the sort. Willie wrote occasionally both to Mrs. Dormer and to Clare, but his letters were

short and did not tell much—writing had always been a difficulty to him, as was indeed all sedentary employment. Then came a report of some much worse than usual scrape. Mr. Dormer heard of it at his club and came home much annoyed.

"Willie Græme is going dreadfully to the bad, I hear," he said to his wife. "I can't have him coming to Riversmead in the vacation. He is not at all a desirable companion for our young people."

"Oh, John, he is really not a bad boy—only rather weak."

"A weak person is often very mischievous," said Mr. Dormer, "and Græme is in a very bad set."

"Poor boy, he has no one to look after him now his dear mother is gone."

"He is not a baby. He should be able to take care of himself."

Clare was in the room during this conversation between her father and mother. It troubled her not a little.

"Oh, mamma," she said afterwards, "you won't give Willie up. Papa is so hard to him."

"Papa does not mean to be hard, dear. I will certainly not give Willie up, but I fear he is not wise in his friendships."

Three years passed. The Dormers frequently met Willie Græme in London, and occasionally he ran down to Fairleigh for a few days, generally bringing a party of friends to shoot or hunt. He was always the same bright, affectionate young fellow to Mrs. Dormer and Clare; but they heard most disturbing tales of his wildness and extravagance. He had left Oxford, and was living in rooms in St. James' Street, which he had furnished in the most ultra-extravagant fashion. He was so handsome, so clever, "such capital company," as every one said, so generous with his money, and alas! so totally unable to say "No," that his popularity was enormous. Men and women were alike attracted by him; he was asked everywhere, and was the life and soul of every party and gathering. He had a charming tenor voice, which made him much in request; was a capital shot, a first-rate lightweight rider and, as in his boyhood, a good cricketer and athlete. All this unfortunately threw him much into a very fast set. Willie not only spent money, but lent money—he could never refuse a friend a loan, nor decline to back a bill. He was so indly, so pleasant, and alas, so *unstable*—the one thing in which

he never wavered was his love for Clare. The childish friendship had ripened into warm affection, and each time he met her at dance, garden-party, or wherever it might be, he thought her lovelier and sweeter than ever. No declaration ever passed between them, and Mr. Dormer so discouraged Willie's coming either to Riversmead or the house in Belgrave Square, that Mrs. Dormer felt she must do all she could to prevent Clare's affection for her old friend becoming anything more.

"I hope there's no nonsense between Clare and Græme?" Mr. Dormer said several times to his wife.

"Only the old friendship, as far as I know. I do not think Clare would conceal it from me if Willie had ever spoken to her of anything further;" but though she answered thus, Mrs. Dormer could not help feeling that Clare's affections were given in more than a *friendly* way to her old playfellow.

Shortly after this conversation the Dormers went abroad. Mrs. Dormer had not been very strong for some time, and thorough change was deemed advisable. Riversmead was shut up and they spent more than a year on the continent. It was a very pleasant year to Clare in many ways. She thoroughly enjoyed all the new scenes they visited, and they met many agreeable people, having letters of introduction to foreign notabilities. In most places they went to, which introduced them to much good foreign society. The one drawback to Clare's happiness was the very disquieting account they heard from time to time of Willie Græme. He never wrote himself—they had never been in the habit of corresponding since he had left Oxford—but Ernest and Gerald often said a word about him, and Mr. Dormer, when he went home to attend to his parliamentary duties, heard many reports of his extravagance and folly.

"I hear he gambles, bets, and some say drinks," wrote the latter. "Even his uncle, Lord Killarney, who is by no means particular, is disgusted with his folly, and says he is nearly ruined."

Then Ernest wrote, "Græme is going it, and no mistake! I met him at Richmond the other day with such a party—ladies of the ballet and a lot of rowdy men—such a row as they kicked up, and Willie appeared to be paymaster for the whole crew. I hear he is spending money like water."

The next news came from Mr. Dormer. "Willie Græme has

come to utter smash. He is mixed up in several most discreditable affairs. You must have nothing further to do with him," he wrote to his wife.

Poor Clare. She heard all this and her heart was wrung. "Poor, poor Willie," she thought. "It all comes of your not being able to say 'no.' You are too confiding and generous, and people take advantage of you. *Weak*, you may be, but *bad*, I will not believe."

When the Dormers at length returned home—it was late in the spring—they spent only a short time in London, and then went to Riversmead. They had never met Willie, but heard of him on every side. Old friends shook their heads and said really the reports were so bad they could no longer know him. Clare longed to meet him—she did not like to write, and felt her mother would not approve of her doing so—but she had to go to Riversmead with her longings unsatisfied.

Then the final crash came. Fairleigh was to be sold. Willie Græme, not yet three-and-twenty, was ruined and his home must go. His career of folly and extravagance had ended very soon.

A few weeks later the Dormers heard he was at home—alone—and probably for the last time. Mrs. Dormer would have liked to go to him, but Mr. Dormer would not hear of it.

"Græme is thoroughly worthless and unprincipled," he said. "I don't wish to have anything further to do with him."

Clare rebelled inwardly at this dictum. "Why, why is papa so hard?" she thought. She grew very pale and thin during these days.

Mrs. Dormer sighed as she saw her. She could not but think the news from Fairleigh had something to do with her daughter's altered looks.

One day in July Mr. Dormer said he heard that Græme was to leave Fairleigh the following morning, but no one seemed to know where he was going.

Clare's heart seemed to stand still. Should she never see him again? It was hard, hard! and now the unhappy girl realized only too well that all her love was given to her old friend.

That evening, after dinner, Clare felt she must go out, the house seemed to stifle her, so wrapping a soft white shawl round her shoulders, she slipped unobserved into the garden, and opening a small gate into the wood which lay between Riversmead

and Fairleigh, strolled along listlessly and sadly, her heart filled with sorrowful thoughts.

"Willie, Willie, Willie," she almost sobbed to herself, "you can't be so bad as they say. My poor boy, why don't you come to us? Papa could not be so hard if he saw you; people always tell the worst."

She paced along the mossy woodland path—where she and Willie and her brothers and sisters had so often played as happy, merry, light-hearted children—heedless of everything but her sorrow. The lingering daylight was slowly dying away; she felt she should turn homewards.

Suddenly she saw another person was walking along the path, with head bent down and hat drawn low over his face. He drew nearer, yes! she could not be mistaken: "Willie!" and she held out both hands towards him.

"Clare!" and in one moment he was beside her. "Oh, my darling! I did not hope, I could not *dare* to hope, to meet you here. I have so longed for one last word, but they told me Mr. Dormer said I was not to come to Riversmead."

"Oh, Willie, I am so grieved and so is mamma."

"My Clare, I am not worth grieving for. I have made such a mess of my life. Forget me, dearest little friend, my one love. Oh! Clare, if I had had you with me always, how different things might have been. But I was first weak and silly, and then I heard your father would not let any of you have more to do with me, and then I grew careless and—but why trouble you, dearest, with such a tale?"

"Oh! Willie, is it too late?" This was no time for reserve and coyness; these young people forgot that no spoken words of love had ever passed between them before, and Clare, sobbing bitterly, with her head on Willie's shoulder, felt that she had always belonged to him and he to her, and that now she was to lose him.

"Too late! Oh! Clare, is it possible that you do care for me a little? Too late! oh, this is hardest of all. I cannot, must not, think of you and love. I have forfeited all right to speak by my mad, blind folly. Forget me, dearest; do not let grief for so worthless a creature ruin your young life," and Willie Græme, utterly overcome, covered his eyes with his hand, whilst hard dry sobs shook him fiercely.

"Willie, Willie, don't ; it is *not* too late, it can never be too late. I *do* love you and will never forget you. Make a new beginning, dear, and I will help you."

Half-an-hour later they parted at the gate into Riversmead garden. The time had sped only too quickly, but Clare dared not stay later ; her mother would anxiously wonder at her absence, and she and Willie had agreed to keep their own counsel till things were more settled. She promised to meet him next day to talk over their future plans, and with one embrace they parted, Clare feeling that the world was far brighter to her than it had been when she passed through that gate nearly two hours earlier.

Mr. and Mrs. Dormer were sitting in the dim evening twilight, at the drawing-room window, when she entered and, saying she felt tired, Clare kissed them both and went to her own room ; she thus escaped with all traces of her unwonted emotion unobserved.

II.

"YES, Clare, Fairleigh must go. There is no help for it, dear. I have spent the whole night, every moment since I parted with you, in thinking if it were possible to save the old home, but, alas ! it must be sold. Even then, I shall have very, very little left. Oh, my darling, you will have to give me up. Mr. Dormer will never let you bind yourself to such a miserable wreck as I am."

"Willie, I will never give you up. I know papa will be vexed. We shall have a struggle, but I will never give you up."

Clare and Willie had met in the woods again as they had agreed the previous evening. They spent several hours together, and then Willie walked home with her to Riversmead.

"I will go and tell your father at once," he said. "We will have no underhand work for him to reproach us with afterwards."

"Then I will go with you, Willie ; it will be best for him to see us together," Clare answered bravely. "We will go to him first and then to mamma."

Mr. Dormer was in his study and was overwhelmed with surprise when he saw his daughter's companion. The interview was a painful one, but on the whole, Mr. Dormer was helpless. Clare was of age ; she could please herself. It was no use Mr. Dormer saying he would not allow any engagement ; Clare was firm.

"Of course I know we must wait," she said, "but I am content to do so. I will never marry any one else. If you choose to turn me out of the house, papa, I must try to earn my bread till Willie is ready for me." Nothing would shake her determination.

Mr. Dormer could only repeat, "I refuse my consent absolutely." He ignored the young man utterly after he had first stormily reproached him with all his misdeeds.

Willie only answered sadly that what he said was too true. He knew how grievously he was to be blamed, but he was still young enough to turn over a new leaf and he meant to do so.

Then Clare took him to her mother. Mrs. Dormer was no less surprised than her husband had been, but imagined at first that he had merely plucked up courage to come and bid his old friends farewell; but when Clare, her hand in Willie's, told her mother that she and Willie were engaged and meant to wait for each other till they could marry, she exclaimed in a tone of horror:

"Oh! Clare, what will papa say? My dear children, I fear this cannot be."

"Papa knows—we have been to him first."

"Yes, Mrs. Dormer, we knew how hard it would be, so we went to Mr. Dormer first. I *know* you cannot either of you approve—I feel how wrong I am in binding Clare——"

"You don't bind me, Willie; I bind myself," she interrupted.

Poor Mrs. Dormer knew not what to say; the old love for Lady Geraldine and her fatherless boy fought sadly with her love for her daughter and desire for her welfare. Willie had proved so unable to fight his own way in the world, how could she intrust her dear Clare to him? It was indeed a struggle—and she knew, too, how strongly her husband would disapprove—but she saw that Clare's heart was given, and knew how steadfastly she would hold to her love, now that he was in trouble, sorrow and difficulty—and Willie, with his warm heart but weak nature, would be so strengthened and encouraged by one like Clare, whose character had all the strength his lacked, added to a very true and loving nature.

The days that followed were by no means easy to Clare. Her father scarcely spoke to her, and she felt it would not do to pour out all her hopes and fears for Willie to her mother, recognizing that the latter's loyalty to her husband would not allow her to show

the sympathy that Clare never doubted she felt. Willie wrote daily—he was in London, settling up his affairs and trying vainly to obtain some employment—and Clare spent much time writing long letters of encouragement to him, full of hopes of happiness in the future, and showing in each line how deep her love for him was.

At last Willie wrote that he feared it was impossible to get anything to do in England, but that a friend who had large tracts of farm land in Australia begged him to return there with him (he was on a visit to England for a few months) and invest the small amount of money left, after all debts were paid, from the sale of Fairleigh, in the colony. "Jack Speirs says I can stay with him till I see my way and that he will help me as much as possible with advice, &c. He is a thorough good, steady fellow, and doing well, and I could not do better than accept his offer, were it not that it almost ties me to a colonial life for many years to come—and how could I ask you to give up home and friends, and all you have been accustomed to, for a life of 'roughing it' and almost isolation? Oh! Clare, you had better give me up, and then it won't matter what I do, or where I go."

Clare did not hesitate to write and urge Willie to accept Mr. Speirs' invitation. She felt he had a much better chance of beginning life afresh in a new country, away from all the old temptations, and she would gladly join him as soon as he was ready for her. It was a hard letter to write, and it cost her many tears, but she put all thoughts of self aside; it was best for Willie, and after all she would have *him*. What more could she want? But she dreaded the long separation terribly—however, there seemed no other course open.

When all was settled, Willie paid a hurried visit to Riversmead. It was indeed a sad farewell. Mr. Dormer refused to see him, but Mrs. Dormer's kind heart would not let him go without a few affectionate words. She was full of misgivings for the future. Clare's influence no doubt could keep him straight when they were together, but was it strong enough to be a safeguard when seas rolled between them? But she wished him God-speed, and prayed inwardly that he might be helped to do what was right, and have strength of mind to resist all temptations to a return to the follies which had already cost him so dear.

Clare tried hard to be very brave, but the parting, and for an indefinite time, was a sore trial ; but she bore up well and strove to comfort Willie, promising to be ready whenever he was able to fetch her. "I must learn all sorts of useful things," she said, smiling through her tears, "to fit me to be a colonist's wife."

"Oh! Clare, and to think that if I had not been such a fool, we might have been happy together at Fairleigh!" Poor Willie's heart was filled with sorrow at parting from Clare, and remorse for his own past folly, the consequences of which he was feeling so bitterly.

Letters came from Gibraltar, Malta, and indeed from each port at which Willie's ship touched. His old dislike to writing seemed to be gone, with many other things of the past. He wrote pages, and Clare eagerly read and re-read each word, and wrote long loving letters in reply ; letters were her chief comfort in these days.

A year passed. Willie had bought land and was very busy, "not making a pile yet," he wrote, "but keeping things going." Mr. Speirs, too, who had known Mrs. Dormer slightly, wrote her a kind note, not mentioning Clare, but saying he felt sure she would be glad to hear that her old friend Lady Geraldine's son was working so well and steadily. "He is a capital colonist, so active, energetic, and enjoys such splendid health ; nothing seems to daunt him, and difficulties seem to melt before his determination to overcome them." This letter was of course read by Clare ; it made her so happy. "Surely papa will relent now," she said, but Mr. Dormer returned it to his wife, after reading it, in silence.

Clare made herself very busy at home, looking well into housekeeping matters for her mother, instructing herself in dairy-work and poultry rearing. She was active, cheerful and happy. Willie's letters were as fond as ever, and she felt that each day brought her nearer to him. She did not go out in society much. Helen had come out now, and Clare laughingly said, "She is quite enough for mamma to manage in the way of chaperoning." Clare's engagement was never mentioned, and people wondered why the beautiful, charming Miss Dormer did not marry. "Had she had a disappointment?" they asked each other. Except Mr. and Mrs. Dormer, her own family were no wiser than the rest of the world. Mr. Dormer's dislike to her "entanglement," as he called it, was as strong as ever, and he begged that no one should be informed of it.

Willie's exile had lasted two years, when Clare received a letter which excited her greatly, and disturbed the calm tenor of her life. He wrote saying that he had been offered, through the influence of Mr. Speirs, a capital government appointment, which would at once give him a sufficient income to fully justify him in marrying, and the pay would increase annually, finally entitling him to retire with a really substantial pension. His own farm was prospering wonderfully, and he would still be able to work that. He had built a capital house, and called it "Fairleigh," in memory of the old home in England. The one drawback was that he must take up the new appointment immediately, and could see no prospect of leave to England for at least three years. "They have kindly agreed to leave it open till I can have a telegraphic answer to this from home. I have told them I wished to consult my *friends*. So, Clare, the decision rests with you—and it means this, dear one: I cannot do without you any longer; there is no good reason why we should wait, but as I cannot go home, will you—Clare, I hardly dare ask it—*will you come out to me?* I could meet you on landing, and we could be married at once, and then come here to our own home, the new 'Fairleigh.' Send me one word by telegraph, 'yes' or 'no'; if the latter, I shall know I have asked too much, shall refuse the appointment, and hope to come home in a year to fetch you." There was much more in the letter, but this was the important part. The request was so unexpected, it came as a shock to Clare. She had looked forward to the time when she should be married to Willie and go with him to the new country, but the idea was that *he* should come home to fetch her; that they should be married—quietly enough, no doubt—in the small country church near both Riversmead and Fairleigh, where his people and hers had worshipped together for so long; this was what she had pictured. And now she was asked to do this other and much more terrible thing—to go all alone, for of course it was not to be expected that her father or any of her family could accompany her: the long sea voyage, the strange country—oh, how could she do this? Mrs. Dormer was away from home; she and Helen had gone to stay with Dorothea for some gaieties. Clare had no one to consult. She knew the answer must go soon. She knew it was useless to ask Mr. Dormer for advice. There was no one to help her. She alone and unaided

must make the decision. She read Willie's letter again and again, took it into her favourite wood, and there walked up and down, unheeding the singing of the birds, the rustling of the leaves—she could hear nothing but Willie's voice saying, "Come to me, Clare." It was a hard struggle, and Clare felt as if she were years older when she at last returned to the house. She had to master all emotion and take her place at the luncheon table with her father, Jack and Ruby.

Mr. Dormer was always silent, but the two latter chattered incessantly, and relieved Clare of the effort to talk.

"I am going to drive to Fairtown this afternoon, papa ; can I do anything for you ?"

Clare's voice shook a little as she asked the question.

Happily Mr. Dormer was unobservant, and did not notice how her face flushed, and the usual calm serenity of her manner was replaced by a nervous agitation that she found it impossible to repress.

"No, Clare, nothing. You might take the children with you."

"Not this afternoon, please, papa."

Clare felt she could not bear the society of even these unnoticing young people. She was going to send off her telegram, and the time spent in driving to the town must be devoted to a final quiet "think" over her answer. She had not, or persuaded herself that she had not, yet made up her mind.

Mrs. Dormer's cobs were happily very quiet and steady-going animals, as Clare let them go pretty well as they liked that afternoon. Her brain was in a fever. Oh ! why was her mother not at home to help her to decide rightly ? It was a terrible responsibility. The cobs seemed to have flown. Clare could not believe her eyes when she saw the small country town post office in front of her. Mechanically she drew up at the door and got out of the carriage, but she walked into the little office firmly enough. Her hand shook as she took up the pencil to write her message. One moment she hesitated after writing Willie's address ; then, her lips firmly pressed together, her head held high, she wrote the one word he had asked for, "Yes." Hurriedly she paid the sum demanded, then walked out into the street again, took her seat in the carriage, and gathering up the reins drove off. She could not go home just yet ; she must have some time alone to regain her wanted calmness. Her head was throbbing, aching,

burning—the quick drive through the open air might in some measure relieve her—so she drove on and on, through long country lanes, choosing those that were most unfrequented, making the ponies go at a speed that was very unusual, as they were seldom hurried out of a sedate trot, but to-day Clare felt rapid motion was what she wanted.

The groom wondered what was up with Miss Dormer. The quiet country drive bored him inexpressibly. Tom liked a town, "where there was something to see."

It was late when Clare returned home, and she went straight to her room to dress for dinner, but to dine alone with Mr. Dormer was more than she could bear, so she sent to say she had a bad headache, and begged he would excuse her, and feverishly drank the cup of tea her maid brought, but could not eat anything.

"Mamma comes home the day after to-morrow," she thought. "I will say nothing till then. She must tell papa for me."

Next morning Clare was able to take her place at the breakfast table as usual. She was pale, and there were dark circles round her eyes, but she had regained her self-control, and was able to answer "yes" to Mr. Dormer's inquiry as to whether her head was better. The die was cast; she must not be foolish. After all it was not a very dreadful thing to do. Many girls, she had heard, went out to India in the same way, to be married. Of course she knew her parents would be vexed, but her marriage altogether was not what they liked, and this would only be one little "rub" the more.

"Oh, Clare, dearest, I don't think Willie should have asked such a sacrifice," Mrs. Dormer exclaimed when, on her return home, Clare told her mother of Willie's letter and her reply. "This will make your father more opposed than ever to your engagement. Three years is not very long to wait."

"Please, mamma, do not try to shake me now. I have given my word to Willie. It is not what I ever expected, but I feel it is best for us *both*. He wants me very much; you have Helen now to take my place, and Ruby also growing up. The loneliness is so hard for Willie, I feel I might be a help and comfort to him," Clare pleaded.

"Your father has always hoped you'd change your mind, Clare."

"But *you* know me too well to think that, mamma."

Mr. Dormer was angry beyond words when his wife told him of Clare's intentions. He had very strict ideas of propriety and seemliness, and that a daughter of his should contemplate such a course appeared terrible in his eyes.

He never spoke to Clare on the subject, but she saw by his manner, never very genial since the day she had declared her determination to marry Willie Græme, how strongly he disapproved.

The weeks passed very slowly till Willie's letter, written on receipt of Clare's telegram, arrived. He thanked her almost passionately for her sweet goodness in taking such a step for his sake. "I have no words, dearest, in which adequately to tell you what joy your 'yes' has given me. I have so longed for you, Clare, more than ever lately. I have not felt very well, and the anxiety after my letter had gone, and till your telegram came, was almost more than I could bear." He went on to say that if she could start by a certain date, Mr. Speirs' brother and his wife were coming out by the ship "*Australasia*" and would be so delighted if she would travel with them. This would be so much pleasanter than going quite alone that Clare felt she must take advantage of the offer. The following post brought a kind note from Mrs. William Speirs, saying they had heard from her brother-in-law that Miss Dormer was going out, and hoped they might arrange to travel together.

Clare's preparations were soon made. Her parting with Mrs. Dormer was most trying to both. It was a sad wrench. Mr. Dormer kissed his daughter coldly, but said no word. Dorothea and Olive, who strongly disapproved of their sister's marriage, wrote to say they "wished her well," but did not offer to come and bid her farewell in person.

Ernest met her in London, and took her to the hotel where the Speirs were staying, but poor Clare felt sadly forlorn next day on board ship, when almost all the other passengers were surrounded by fond relations and friends, come to see them off, and she had not one of her own people to give her a parting word.

Clare proved an excellent sailor. The ship was very comfortable, the weather all that could be wished. Her cabin companion was a delicate girl, the orphan daughter of a country

clergyman. She was going to an aunt at Melbourne, who had offered her a home at her father's death. Nelly Newsam was a gentle, affectionate and timid creature, to whom the voyage was a misery and terror, and Clare found plenty of occupation in attending on and comforting the nervous little girl; and she in return was full of affectionate gratitude, clinging to Clare as to a rock of defence against all danger. It was a very good thing for the latter that she had Nelly as an interest and occupation, taking her out of herself, and preventing her brooding over her own sorrow at parting, as she had done, from all her own people. The William Speirs were a kind middle-aged couple, both *hors de combat* for the first few days, so that Clare saw but little of them till the ship arrived at Gibraltar.

At each port where the ship stopped Clare found a letter from Willie, sent to greet her on her outward way. These were a great joy and comfort to her, and most pleasantly relieved the monotony of the voyage. She was of too reserved a nature to make friends very readily amongst her fellow-passengers; the Speirs and Nelly Newsam were her only intimate companions.

As the voyage drew to a close, Clare could not help a feeling of nervousness, which she seemed powerless to escape from; she fought against it, but still it was there. How should she find Willie? Would there be any change in him since they had parted? She had overheard one of the passengers relate a story of a girl who had gone out to India to be married to a man she had been engaged to for years, that when she landed at Bombay she found he had that morning married some one else; but, after all, she laughed to herself, why should this story frighten her? It was not so *very* long since she had seen Willie; had she not had constant letters from him, each one warmer and more loving than the last? But though she resolutely strove to banish all feelings of nervousness, her agitation was extreme as the "Australasia" steamed slowly into harbour.

Clare could not go on deck, as almost all the other passengers did; she sat in her cabin, with heart beating, wildly, madly. Ah! there was his voice. She opened the door. "Clare." "Willie."

All doubts, fears, tremors were gone as Clare felt Willie's arms around her. Tears of joy filled her eyes and for several minutes she could not speak.

Jack Spiers had come on board to meet his brother. They all went ashore together. Willie had made arrangements, he told Clare, to be married that very day, and they were to start immediately after the ceremony for Fairleigh.

Such haste rather took Clare's breath away, but after all, there was no reason for delay. She felt it would be foolish to object.

Clare noticed that Willie had grown much older-looking in the two years he had been abroad. He was browner, thinner, and had grown a beard. His manner was restless and excited. Every few moments, when speaking to the Speirs, he would turn suddenly and place his hand on Clare's hand, or arm, or shoulder, as though to assure himself she was really there.

The quiet, almost private, ceremony was over. Willie and Clare were man and wife. A hasty lunch, so unlike the conventional wedding breakfast, followed. The carriage that was to convey them up-country was at the door.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Græme." Clara started for a moment at the new name, then looked up at Jack Speirs' kind face with a shy smile. "Make Willie take it easy for a bit," he added. "He has been working very hard lately, rather overdoing himself; a few weeks of happy idleness will do him a world of good."

They said good-bye to the Speirs and Nelly Newsam, who had begged to be "bridesmaid" before going to her aunt. The carriage drove off.

Willie talked incessantly; he appeared more and more excited. It was scarce noon when they had left Melbourne. They had driven for hours. A feeling of alarm crept over Clare, which grew stronger as Willie's excitement increased. His talk began to lose coherence; his hand which held Clare's was feverishly hot. He urged the driver continually to greater speed. They changed horses once on the way, and Clare had some tea at the wayside inn, but Willie refused to eat or drink. He walked up and down, and when the fresh horses were ready, seized Clare almost roughly and hurried her into the carriage. Poor girl! At each moment her terror increased. She feared she knew not what. From time to time he embraced her passionately, and a climax to her terror arrived when after doing so he burst into wild screams of laughter. She tried to soothe him, to make him talk quietly. It was no use.

At length he called to the driver to stop; without one word to

Clare, he leaped from the carriage and hurried away. Some time she waited, anxiously expecting each moment to see him return, when suddenly a pistol shot rang through the still evening air. Clare, pale and almost fainting with terror, yet managed to get out of the carriage, and with heart wildly beating and trembling limbs, hastened in the direction from which the shot came. What a sight met her eyes! There lay her new-made husband, dying or dead, the pistol by his side. "Willie, Willie," she cried as she fell on her knees beside him. "Oh! my darling, my darling, what is this?" Alas, she could not deceive herself; he was dead. She dragged herself painfully to the carriage again. In a voice that was hoarse, though scarce audible, she said to the driver, as she went to the horses' heads, "Bring him."

How the long drive back to Melbourne was accomplished Clare never knew; she remained as one stunned and unconscious. The driver of the carriage returned to the hotel from which Clare had started so few hours ago a happy bride. It was night when they arrived. The Speirs were still there, and the hotel-keeper at once roused the sleeping Jack, whose grief and horror were unbounded. He threw on his clothes and flew down stairs. Clare was still in the carriage, her face deadly pale, her eyes fixed and staring, her hands, which twitched nervously, clasped tightly together, the dead body of her husband stretched beside her, a shawl over him, which covered the face and hid the terrible wound in the forehead where the bullet had entered. Mechanically Jack helped Clare to alight, then led her to his sister-in-law's room. Mrs. Speirs met them in an agony of shocked surprise; Clare's calmness terrified her. She looked as though she had been turned to stone, no tears had come to relieve her agony; if the strain continued her mind must give way.

Clare maintained her stony, unnatural calm till Willie's funeral was over, and then she lay for many weeks unconscious, hovering between life and death, but her splendid constitution at length conquered, and she rose once more from her bed, a broken-hearted woman. Her beautiful hair had all been shaved off when the brain fever was at its height, and when it grew again it was snow-white.

The Speirs had stayed with her during her illness, Mrs. Speirs and Nelly Newsam nursing her devotedly. They had telegraphed to Riversmead, and a few days after Clare left her bed

for the first time, Mrs. Dormer arrived to take her widowed daughter home. The meeting between mother and daughter was heartrending. Clare's tears flowed freely now.

From Jack Speirs, Mrs. Dormer heard how poor Willie had overworked himself. He had been advised and urged to take rest, but would not. His excitement and agitation as the time for Clare's arrival approached had been tremendous, and under the combined strain of this and of hard work, there could be no doubt the brain had given way, and he had committed the fatal deed in a moment of insanity. They never dared ask Clare for any particulars of the drive up country; the driver had told Jack all he knew.

Clare returned to England with her mother, but she could not go to Riversmead. She entered one of the London hospitals, serving her time first as a probationer, and staying on as nurse. All joy had fled from her life, but she found a quiet happiness in ministering to those who were ill and suffering. "Nurse Clare" was pronounced by all the doctors to be the best and most valuable of their assistants. Her quiet, self-controlled manner seemed to soothe the most restless and impatient of those she nursed. She was so gentle, so patient, so cool when these qualities were most needed.

She cherished Willie's memory as something too sacred to be spoken of; all his faults, follies and shortcomings were wiped out and forgotten, and only his loveliness, his beauty and his constant love for her remembered, and for his dear sake she held out a helping hand to many a young man whose weakness needed such help to keep him from falling into the faults and follies which had wrecked Willie Græme's life.

This Transitory Life.

By THOROLD DICKSON and M. PECHELL.

CHAPTER I.

"I see thee quake ; come let us home repair,
Come hide thee in mine arms,
If not for love, then to shun greater harms."

Drummond of Hawthornden.

PICCADILLY between eleven and twelve at night early in November. A north-easter is whistling down the street, it is freezing hard, and the thermometer is falling fast. The English winter has come in with one of those sudden rushes, which kill in their outset the weak and the old and the unsuspecting by scores. They are like the spasmodic fits of extreme virtue and exact morality, that at intervals agitate society. They come and go like the whirlwind none knows whence or whither. When they are gone we count the dead and wounded.

Within the last week the weather has been as bright and soft as the heart of man could desire, and the Honourable Douglas Straight, who owned to many weaknesses, but not to that of enthusiasm, had admitted to an intimate friend, and in confidence, "That if it were always like this during eleven months out of the twelve, England would be quite a decent place to live in, it would indeed."

He was now making his way along Piccadilly, cursing, under his breath, the climate of his country and the social conventions which compel men to face it in evening dress, patent leather shoes and silk socks. He had been dining in St. James' Square, and was inhospitably wishing the square and all that dwell therein at the bottom of the sea. It had fallen to his lot to take in to dinner a lady of a large and philanthropic zeal, which ranged from the unemployed at Whitechapel to the loafers of Canton.

"Had Mr. Straight heard whether the Government were going to build another prison, to give work to the unemployed?"

"Outside the walls, or inside?"

The rejoinder was disregarded.

"And really they must know at the Foreign Office, where they know everything, what action would be taken to revenge the outrage on the missionaries at Woosung?"

The girl on his other side was American, amusing and unconventional, and kept most of her conversation for a young baronet in the Guards. In other words Douglas Straight was at the present moment profoundly bored. As he made his way towards his rooms in the Albany, he suddenly stopped and gave a low whistle of surprise. On the opposite side of the way, a young girl, evidently on her way from the theatre, was hastening along in an agitated "hither and thither" course, that betokened fear and mental distress. It was late and she was alone. A rough, coarse-complexioned man accosted her. She started violently and went off with redoubled haste across the street. Narrowly escaping a passing hansom, she tripped by treading on her dress as she reached the pavement, and fell forward almost into Straight's arms.

"I think," said he very slowly, and holding her hands for a moment, "that you had better let me see you safely home."

The few moments sufficed to bring the girl to her senses; she recognized that the man before her was a gentleman, and then the reaction set in; she had been much distressed and not a little frightened. She was now safe. She accordingly sought relief in tears, which was natural enough, but embarrassing for Straight. For a Foreign Office *attaché* to be seen succouring a distressed damsel at midnight in Piccadilly was a situation not to be tolerated for a moment. He called a hansom, placed his unknown charge in it and jumped in himself.

"Addlebury Road, West Kensington."

Straight repeated the semi-hysterical command to the driver and then reviewed the situation. The humour of it was what struck him most. Under their drooping lids his eyes twinkled maliciously, and as his lips twitched into a sardonic smile, Straight covered the situation with a light puff from his cigarette.

"You don't mind my smoking this out, or shall I throw it away?"—but the lady showing fresh symptoms of hysterical weeping, her guide and mentor changed his tone. "Come, come, this won't do. You will make yourself ill if you go on like that. The theatre has been too much for you. What have you been to see?"

' 'A Dire Revenge' at the Corsican."

"Ah! I thought so. Melodrama is to be avoided. Bad for the nerves, so are cigarettes; but then they are pleasant, melodrama isn't."

His companion laughed and rejoined:

"I daresay you are right. It has made me behave like a great goose. At least I got separated from Mrs. Cartright and Janet by the crush in the Haymarket and they crossed without me, and I lost them altogether, and then I did not know what to do."

"So it would appear," remarked Straight quietly.

"You are laughing at me. But you have been very kind, and I am sure mother will wish to thank you when we get home. My name is Lorrimer, we live very quietly, and we do not often go out anywhere."

"And do not know what our delightful climate can do on a night like this. You are shivering all over." And half rising Straight skilfully divested himself of his fur coat and threw it over Miss Lorrimer. He would hear of no protests. The glass was let down to keep out the biting air, and he leaned back in his corner of the cab. The girl was leaning slightly forward. Yes, she was *very* pretty, there was no denying it. Under the loose, white wrapper round her head some fair hair strayed out about a low straight brow, and the delicate outline of her face stood out in soft relief against the cold clear sky. Very *petite*, very *mignonne*, a fresher flower than Straight had often seen in his own world: "*Dans le monde où l'on s'ennuie*," he thought.

"We shall soon be home now, we have just passed Olympia."

"Perhaps it is as well," Straight muttered under his breath; "the cold seems to be affecting my senses."

"They call it West Kensington," the girl added simply, "but it is really Hammersmith. Here we are."

The cab pulled up among some fifty little semi-detached villas, standing primly in a row with the latest improvements, and Swiss cottage-like discomforts written all over them.

No, Straight would not come in. It was late. Yes, perhaps he was rather cold, but only another reason for hurrying home.

"Perhaps you will give my card to Mrs. Lorrimer. I shall hope to call and inquire after you in a day or two. I hope you have not caught a chill? Good-night."

As the cab wheeled round he caught sight of a slim girlish

figure disappearing in the enfolding embrace of a stout, matronly person, breathless with agitated affection.

"A nice story to get about against me at Brooks's," thought Straight.

Next morning at the office the first man he ran against was Cathcart, a genial young Irishman, whose attitude towards life was that of a participator in a huge joke and comedy provided free of charge by a distant Providence, whose further kindly intentions he contentedly took for granted.

"Ah, Straight, my dear boy, and I'm glad to be the first to tell you the news. I am, indeed. You have got your wish: third secretary at Rome; to leave at once. Italy's a great country, and I almost wish I were coming with you; though London is not altogether devoid of attractions, by no means."

"Thanks, old chap," replied Straight slowly, then, half to himself, "I suppose it was bound to come sooner or later."

"What's the matter with Straight?" burst out the indignant Cathcart a little later to his friend Grigsby. "There's no pleasing him. He's given Rome, which he's been dying for, and when I tell him he just drawls out, 'Thanks, old chap,' as though I'd offered him one of those infernal cigarettes he is for ever smoking."

"Cherchez la femme," quoth the sapient and laconic Grigsby.

That afternoon Straight called at Addlebury Road. "I said I would," he explained to himself.

Mrs. Lorrimer received him with embarrassing warmth and gratitude for his services to her daughter, which Alice herself came in in time to supplement. She had been out walking, and in the lithe figure and elastic step and bright fresh face Straight hardly recognized the timid, shrinking girl of the night before. They gave him tea and made much of him, while Mrs. Lorrimer discoursed at length of their old home at Croydon, of her husband's failure in business, and their subsequent removal to their present tiny dwelling. "He didn't stand it long," she added. "He kept fretting about it, and said he had ruined us, and now I have only got Alice." And Mrs. Lorrimer beamed across at her daughter, who blushed faintly in response.

Soon afterwards Straight left. "Now that's over," he thought to himself.

A week later he remembered he had kept his approaching

departure for Rome to himself, and as he was calling at Holland Park Road he decided to do the civil thing by Mrs. Lorrimer, and look in there also to say good-bye.

Alice was singing as he came in; a fresh, sweet voice if not highly trained, he thought, and on a good-natured impulse he suggested taking three tickets for the next Saturday concert at St. James's Hall. Alice hesitatingly accepted.

Before the day arrived Straight had to look things in the face, this girl was never out of his thoughts. He knew what that meant. The idea was absurd. He half regretted the invitation to the concert, but only half regretted, and when the day came, and Mrs. Lorrimer's asthma kept her a prisoner to the house, and he and Alice sat together, he did not regret it at all.

He watched her eyes grow brighter and her colour come and go with pleasure at the flood of harmony that filled the hall, and Douglas Straight thought, manlike, that the girl just then sitting by his side was the sweetest, fairest, and most desirable of all fair things under the sun.

On the way home he asked her to become his wife, and she consented.

Mrs. Lorrimer cried and laughed alternately, and declared it was the happiest day in her life, which indeed it was.

"You are of age, and can please yourself," was Lord Harborough's curt acknowledgment of the news.

CHAPTER II.

"A time to dance."

"I MUST congratulate you. How beautiful your wife is. She will be the *belle* of the season. There are absolutely no pretty girls here this winter, English or American."

"Thank you. Yes, my wife is considered pretty, but her people have lived very quietly, and she is unaccustomed to much society."

"*Indeed*," and Mrs. Zante Browne raised her glasses and gave a prolonged stare across the room to where Alice was seated, listening to the conversation of a tall young man.

"Fond of dancing, I suppose," she added as the band struck up a valse, and the girl, with a hasty glance in her husband's direction, placed her hand upon her partner's arm.

"Oh, yes—that is—at least I suppose so," muttered Straight, following his wife with his eyes. "What on earth has induced her to try to waltz?" was his unspoken comment. "She might at least have waited for some other occasion instead of making a spectacle of herself with all Rome looking on."

All Rome, to Straight's mind, being the congregation of English and Italians then present in the ball-room of the British Embassy, there assembled to "Have the honour to meet their Majesties, King Umberto and Queen Margherita."

That dancing was not Alice's *forte* soon became apparent to the spectators, for she swayed and jerked about in a hopeless manner, treading on her partner's toes, getting entangled in her train, and finally slipping and landing breathless and dishevelled in the lap of a portly Italian dowager.

"We have not arrived at the latest steps here, evidently," remarked Mrs. Zante Browne with a child-like smile, "though Sir Eustace Farquhar is our best dancer."

Douglas bit his lip, for Mrs. Zante Browne had the sharpest tongue in Rome, and had not forgiven him for not having married her niece the season before.

"Come and have some refreshment, won't you?" he said hastily; "or have you seen Lord Belville's new picture? No? Then you really must; it is in the side room off the corridor. You can always tell which are his own by the lamps hanging in front of them."

With a sudden and unwonted fit of good-humour, Mrs. Zante Browne allowed herself to be led away; and in discoursing upon the ambassador's artistic achievements, Straight felt his wounded spirit somewhat comforted, for he was nothing if not sensitive to ridicule.

* * * *

"What induced you to make such a spectacle of yourself?" inquired Straight, when he and his wife had returned to their apartment in the Via Condotti. "Your first appearance, too, and every one looking on. If you were going to dance you might at least have taken lessons first."

"I'm very sorry," replied Alice penitently. "I did not mean to, but the music was so good and Sir Eustace said he was sure I could dance, so I thought I would just try, but I won't do it again."

But Douglas was not to be mollified all at once, and continued :

"And then your dress, too—I heard some one say it ought to have been white. Women ought to know what is the correct thing on these occasions."

"But you know you always said you liked me in pink. I put it on to please you, Douglas."

"Well, of course, my dear girl, you don't know what's what yet ; but for goodness sake get some woman to put you up to the wrinkles. Mrs. Zante Browne, for instance ; she always knows what's the correct thing."

"That horrid old woman with the white hair you introduced me to, who stares so rudely through her glasses ?"

"Yes, but she is a power here, and if you take her advice she'll show you what's good form. You must get used to society, you know. In diplomacy so much depends on a fellow's wife."

"I'm afraid you've chosen a wrong sort of girl, then. You ought to have married some one more like your sister, for instance. She has such a manner, and doesn't mind going into a room or anywhere else by herself. I feel so awkward and never know what to say."

"Oh, my sister's well enough. Of course she has been used to that sort of thing all her life. And the other people you will meet when we stay at Harborough House are just like that, and then——"

Here Straight broke off, for he remembered the plainly expressed ideas of his people on his marriage, and wondered when they would relent so far as to invite his wife to the family place. His sister indeed had come to see Alice on her way through London, a visit prompted more by curiosity than kindly feeling, and had expressed her opinion of her sister-in-law in her usual outspoken way.

"You've married a doll, Douglas, an uncommon pretty one, I admit, but I should say she hadn't got two ideas in her head. But give her a bit of social education, and I should say she would pass."

It is the privilege of one's relations to say disagreeable things. That is their *raison d'être*.

"You see," continued Alice after a pause, during which time Straight had helped himself to a B. and S., "all the time we lived in London, ever since I was ten years old, we knew

nobody and never visited anywhere. The clergyman called, and so did the doctor, and once I was invited to a dance, but mother would not let me go; and that evening you met me in Piccadilly was the first time I had been to a theatre. The doctor and his wife took me with a party, and I am so glad I persuaded mother to let me go. But for that I should never have met you."

"But surely you must have seen somebody during all those years? You must have relations of some sort. It is an infliction few of us escape."

"Oh yes, they came sometimes; at least when Jack was there."

"Jack! who was Jack?" inquired Straight suspiciously. "You've never mentioned him before."

"Jack is my brother."

"Why, you never told me you had a brother living! I thought all your brothers and sisters were dead!"

Alice muttered something confusedly, and then said with an apparent effort:

"Yes, I have a brother, though I never told you. He is in — America now."

"Well, I must say it is the most extraordinary thing. Here we have been married a whole month and I never knew that you had a brother. What does he do?"

"I—that is, I don't know—farming, most likely," and Alice busied herself over the buttons of her long gloves.

Douglas felt hurt. Had he not a right to be so? Here was his newly-wedded wife first covering him with ridicule, by making a deplorable fiasco on her *début* in Roman society, and secondly wilfully concealing from him the existence of a brother.

"Well," he said, "I daresay I shall learn a good deal about your relations before long, but whoever they were or whatever they did, it can't be helped now. But, anyway, I hope you will remember you have married into a different sort of life altogether, and have your place to take in society. If there's one thing more than another I detest it is a social blunder."

"I hate society. We were so happy before we came here, and had no one to think about but ourselves."

"Little goose! A honeymoon can't last for ever. It would very soon develop into a treacle-moon if it did, and—what's the matter?"

A pretty woman in tears is a sight that generally touches a man's heart, at least if he has not been hardened by matrimony. So the lecture came to an abrupt end.

CHAPTER III.

"Why do you look so strange upon your wife?"

All's Well that Ends Well.

WE English are not an adaptive race ; with few exceptions we remain in the grooves in which we were brought up. The French and Americans are different. The Western heiress is transplanted from "Poppa's" sausage factory or log cabin to London drawing-rooms and Paris *salons*, and takes to luxury as to the manner born. She wears the loveliest creations of Worth, who but a few months before made her own dresses, and eats dinners prepared by *chefs*, where lately she herself had cooked the mid-day meal. Place a French shop girl among the *élite* of society, and in an hour's time you would not know that she had not mixed in that society all her life.

Alice was specially unadaptive. She was shy and self-conscious, which led to many social blunders and gave her an air of *gaucherie* which even her beauty could hardly carry off. Transplanted to a new world she failed to take root therein. She disliked it, and the inhabitants thereof. Their ways were not as her ways, nor hers as theirs. For Douglas's sake she tried to overcome her shyness, and endured martyrdoms to which those of St. Cecilia were mild indeed. But to no purpose, and at last she gradually gave up society, declining nearly every invitation and leaving her husband to take his amusements alone. The days became unutterably long and dreary. All day long Straight was at the Embassy, and every evening he had engagements to dinners, balls, &c. For he was a popular fellow, and many ladies in the official world pitied him.

"Such a nice fellow, but married to a stupid little nobody, quite thrown himself away, and he will be Lord Harborough too ; his brother is not expected to live much longer."

Alice took to exploring Rome. Day by day she wandered about among the ruins, guide book in hand, and traced out the sites celebrated in Roman history, wondering as she did so if it would not have been better to have lived in those days, and if

the world was not a much easier place for women then than it is now.

Returning from one of these expeditions one day, she saw a spectre. Not a sensible, well-regulated ghost that can be classified and enrolled in the Psychical Society's reports, but a vague, shadowy something that went before her, coming between her and the sunlight: in the far distance at first, but always coming nearer, and when she shut her eyes it was still there.

There is a terror about the unknowable. When we know exactly what is before us we summon up courage to the fray, but the unknown horror paralyzes our nerves and freezes our blood, and turns the bravest into the veriest coward.

Terrified and unable to escape the spectre's presence Alice grew weak and ill; she lost her appetite, and as she grew weaker the spectre grew stronger and more lifelike. Though when Douglas was with her it paled and retired to a distance.

One day after she had returned, tired and hungry, from a long afternoon in the Forum, the spectre came and stood by her chair and spoke:

"You do not know me, though many of your relations do. Some day I shall have the pleasure of introducing myself."

Alice covered her ears and gave a cry.

"What on earth is the matter?"

And Straight, who had come in during the ghost's speech, came and stood beside his wife.

"I—I don't know; but I got frightened. You are always away now and it is so lonely."

"Sorry, my dear; but official duties are imperative. Why do you mope in here by yourself? Why don't you go and pay calls and drive about with the other women? I heard Mrs. Zante Browne say the other night that she often wanted to take you with her, but you always refused her invitations."

"I don't want to pay calls or go drives with other people. I want you, Douglas. Couldn't you spare me a little time some days?"

"You are hipped and run down, that's what it is; you want a tonic or something of the sort. Do you know you're quite losing your looks too."

"But you love me, Douglas, quite as much as you did at first?"

And, in spite of what he had just said about her appearance, she did look very pretty, with her eyes raised pleadingly to his.

"Love you ; of course I do," he replied, kissing her ; "and I don't want to see you moped and seedy."

"Then stay with me this evening ; we will dine together and go to the theatre afterwards ; that will be like old times."

Douglas bit his moustaches.

"Why didn't you say you wanted to go before ? I've got an engagement I can't get out of : to dine at the Countess d'Avanzi's and go to the opera with them afterwards. By Jove ! it's time I was dressed, too ; it's nearly seven o'clock. Where's that villain Pietro ?" And sharply ringing the bell, he hurried out.

Returning twenty minutes later, in evening dress, he kissed his wife with more warmth than usual. Possibly his conscience pricked him just a little. He had been at the countess's very often lately. She was a quick-witted, sharp-tongued American, who some months before had purchased a title, with a dissipated poverty-stricken Italian attached ; and Douglas forgot her plainness in her brilliant conversation.

"Keep up your spirits. Here's Guy de Maupassant's latest to amuse yourself with, and on no account wait up for me," and he was off.

French novels had no charm for Alice, and after wading drearily through the first chapter she gave it up, and the spectre, who during Straight's presence had retired behind the window curtain, came out and spent the evening on the hearth-rug.

The next morning was a glorious day, and Alice started for a long ramble in the Campagna. Though only February, the sun shone as on a July day in England. The clear air, the deep blue sky, and the green undulating hills all seemed to say, "It is good to be alive." Alice felt it so at all events, and a load seemed lifted from her mind, for the spectre had stayed at home. She walked on and on, now and then stopping to explore some ruin, or turning to gaze at the dome of St. Peter's, now far behind her.

At mid-day she sat down to eat some sandwiches, and afterwards continued her journey. Picking her way amongst some ruins she dislodged a stone, which fell with a crash several feet below her. Now a large sheep-dog was taking a *siesta* in the shade of the ruins when the stone fell, hitting him on the head

and annoying him very much. He arose, uttered a defiant howl, and went for the enemy.

Alice took to her heels ; she had several yards' start, and kept ahead for a short time. The race was exciting, but long odds on the dog, and in a few minutes he caught her up and was proceeding to test the quality of her dress when a shower of blows made him drop his prey and retreat, howling, to a distance.

"I'm awfully glad I came up when I did," said the new-comer. "That brute would have bitten you badly." And Alice, as soon as she could collect her scattered senses sufficiently, recognized the cheerful face and boyish figure of Harry Vernon, youngest attaché at the Embassy.

"But really, Mrs. Straight," he continued, "you are doing a most risky thing. It's awfully unsafe for a lady to walk outside the walls alone. There are plenty of ruffians loafing about who would not hesitate to rob you. I always carry a good thick stick myself." 4

"Yes, I suppose it is unsafe ; but I feel so tired of being in the town always, and the air is lovely out here."

"Why don't you get your husband to go with you ? A long walk or two would do him good."

"He can never get away from the Embassy till quite late."

Vernon gave a low whistle—he had met Straight two or three times lately, driving with the Countess d'Avanzi quite early in the afternoon.

"Well, Mrs. Straight, when you are well enough I will see you home. I'm afraid you are dreadfully shaken."

"I'm all right now," said Alice, rising ; but she tottered as she spoke, and had to lean on Vernon's arm for support. Slowly they progressed, and after many halts reached the Porta Pia, where a carriage was hailed.

Straight was at home when they reached the house, and after hearing of his wife's adventure, agreed with Vernon that she had been guilty of a very rash proceeding.

"If I'd known you were so keen on country walks," he said, "I'd try to get off duty earlier and go with you."

"If Mrs. Straight ever wants an escort," chimed in Vernon, "I shall be delighted if she will let me go with her. I'm awfully fond of the country, don't you know," he continued, "and on days when there is no hunting a walk in the Campagna is just the thing I like."

So it came to pass that Alice and Vernon did the country and ruins together, and that youth often dropped in casually for afternoon tea in the Via Condotti.

"Mrs. Straight is an awfully nice little woman," confided Vernon to his great ally, Miss Trefusa P. Watts, of Chicago, as they were waiting for the fox to break cover next morning. "She's a bit shy at first, but when you get to know her there's a lot in her."

"Dare say. Not my style though. Hasn't got a word to say for herself," replied that damsel, who, in common with the other ladies, did not find Alice interesting. "There he is at last. Shall I give you a lead?"

* * * * *

A few weeks after these events Straight, returning earlier than usual, went into the *salon* of their flat and called to his wife:

"Come, Alice; we shall just have time for a drive before going to dine with Mrs. Zante Browne. Hurry up and get your things on."

No answer, and he was just turning to leave the room when he caught sight of a figure bundled up in a shapeless mass on the sofa.

"What on earth is the matter with you; are you ill?"

A stifled groan was the only reply.

"Got a headache?" he asked, taking her hand.

"Yes, I can't come out."

"Not come out! What shall I get you? You must get well by this evening."

"I can't go out this evening."

"By Jove! there must be something wrong. I'll send for Dr. Barrett."

"No, no, not on any account. Please don't. It is really nothing; I shall get all right if I'm left alone. My head is bad."

"Well, you ought to have advice of some sort. You had a bad headache only yesterday. Much better see a doctor."

But Alice refused to take anything or to move from her position on the sofa, and after drenching her head with eau-de-Cologne, Douglas was fain to leave her and proceed to the dinner party alone.

After he had gone Alice, covering her face with her hands, sobbed long and bitterly, for the spectre had introduced himself to her that afternoon.

* * * * *

At the dinner Straight was much taken with his *vis-à-vis*, a lean man apparently about forty; his face burned by tropical suns, and deeply furrowed; his eyes, deep-set and keen as a hawk's, seemed to look things through and through.

He did not speak much or take any interest in the conversation going on around him, but Straight felt that this man was watching him; those far-seeing eyes seemed to be looking into the innermost recesses of his mind, yet whenever he looked up the man appeared to be absorbed in his dinner.

Mrs. Zante Browne was an inveterate lion hunter, and Straight suspected that this man was some new celebrity. When he joined the ladies, he inquired the stranger's name of his hostess's niece.

"The man with the peculiar eyes, who sat opposite you? That is Mr. Moncrieff; he is something or other in India, and has just supplied Government with some valuable information. He has written a great deal about the East and its inhabitants, and is supposed to be one of the best Oriental scholars in the world."

"He *has* peculiar eyes, certainly," said Straight. "Looks as if he could hypnotize or something of that sort."

"Yes, I believe he goes in for all sorts of occult science."

"But I don't see him here," said Straight, looking round the room.

"No," replied his companion, laughing "He never comes into ladies' society when he can help it. Among other qualities he is an ardent woman-hater."

CHAPTER IV.

"A man after his own heart."

"Is it bad news?" asked Alice.

Straight had dropped the telegram he had been reading and exclaimed, "Poor fellow!"

"Yes, my brother is very ill, dying, probably; all alone in India too. I must go to him at once."

"To India!"

"Yes, it's nothing of a journey now, fourteen days from Brindisi. Just a chance I *may* find him alive. Poor old Vincent! We were always chums. Anyway I should have to go to collect his things and see everything settled up out there. I'll go and apply for leave at once."

"Douglas," said Alice, coming up and laying her hands on his arm, "let me come too; don't leave me here alone."

"Oh, impossible. You'd have to get a lot of things for the voyage, and I must start to-night to catch the mail at Brindisi. Besides you have been so seedy lately, and it's getting hot out there now."

"But I can't stay here alone, it's so miserable. I don't mind the heat, and the voyage will do me good."

"Really you can't come. Travelling in such a hurry I shall have to rough it a good deal. I must reach Poona as soon as possible, you would only get knocked up by the way, and I could not leave you alone anywhere. If you are dull here, why don't you go home? Dr. and Mrs. Barrett are going to England next week; I'll make arrangements for you to travel with them if you like."

"No, I don't want to go home without you. If you won't let me come with you, I will stay here."

Alice, as her husband said, had certainly not been well lately, and her headaches were of frequent occurrence. She had lost all her colour, and her eyes had assumed a dull, leaden hue, yet she steadfastly refused to see any doctor.

Straight, however, remained firm in his refusal to allow her to accompany him to India, and his leave being granted, that evening found him ensconced in the corner of a first-class carriage in the Brindisi express.

* * * * *

Leaning over the side of the P. and O. steamer Straight watched the town, harbour and lighthouse of Brindisi disappear in the distance. All around him hurry and bustle, passengers inquiring for their luggage, ships' officers greatly harassed, hurrying to and fro, Lascars heaving ropes and chattering all together, as is their wont, and the great sacks of mails bearing home news to the Indian Empire being lowered to their resting place.

Douglas heeded none of these things, he was thinking out his position. His eldest brother was dying, might even then be dead. Poor fellow! he would willingly have granted him a few more years of life, but it was ordained. Well, he would be Lord Harborough, that was all right; he would still continue his profession; but his wife—aye, there was the rub. Why had he been fool enough to marry in such desperate haste? He still was fond of Alice, but she hampered him in his career; she was like a fish out of water, and did not seem to improve. He had made a fatal mistake. Well, he was not the first man, by a long way, who had ruined his career for the sake of a girl's pretty face (that was the way he put it). Beauty was indeed a snare and a delusion, and Alice had certainly lost a great deal of her good looks since marriage. Here his conscience pricked him just a little: had he not neglected her somewhat? but then she did not understand him, and how can a man be companionable to his wife when he is not understood?

"I beg your pardon," said a voice interrupting his meditations, "but I think we have met before."

Straight turned round and saw his late *vis-à-vis* at Mrs. Zante Browne's dinner.

"Mr. Moncrieff! Very glad to see you," he said heartily, for he was glad to see a familiar face in that crowd of human beings.

"So we are to be companions in misery for the next fortnight. You are going to Bombay?"

"Yes, my brother, poor fellow, is dangerously ill at Poona. I have hardly hopes of finding him alive, still there is just a chance. What part of India do you hail from?"

"Dallapore. Native state, you know. I'm in charge of the Rajah there. Pretty place too, and not a bad climate."

"I heard in Rome you had written a lot about India and the natives, and had given Government some valuable information, and that they had offered you an important appointment."

The political agent blew a cloud of smoke from his cheroot and replied:

"Yes, I have written and spoken much, and had my advice been taken on one or two occasions serious complications might have been avoided. Our whole system of administration in the East is rotten to the core. We send youngsters out from home

to govern people about whom they know nothing. We ought to study the ways and character of the natives ; they are as different from us as black from white, and no amount of learning or civilization will alter them. Can the leopard change his spots or the Ethiopian his skin? We make no attempt to understand them, and with one or two exceptions"—and here he named a celebrated Orientalist and traveller—"A—— is the only man who has thoroughly done so ; and did Government ever listen to his advice?"

"Red-tapeism and general ignorance prevail," remarked Straight, who had one or two grievances of his own.

"Just so. At a dinner in town last week, a leading political lady asked me if Indian affairs would not go on much better now that a native was in the House! There is something distinctly refreshing in the innocence which exists anent all affairs in the East."

"Well, I don't know much about Indian affairs myself," said Douglas, "but I should say India was a beastly hole to live in."

"Every man according to his taste," replied Moncrieff. "Most men abuse India when they are living there, but when once they have retired lament it ever after. I like it, though ; there is a charm about the East for me. For people who see below the surface there is a lot to learn. To those who only know Anglo-India, who associate with the people only in courts of justice, *durbars* and such like, there is little to be seen. For those who wear blue glasses all the world is blue. I have lived with the people and as the people. I have gone disguised to places where no white man has ever set foot. I have seen things—but, pardon me, I have a bad habit of moralizing, it comes from living alone. Try one of these cheroots—Oh, there is the dinner bell."

The more Straight saw of the political agent the more he felt attracted to him ; there was a fascination about him he could not describe. Yet now and again he felt a strange repulsion, though it lasted only a moment.

So it came to pass that these two might always be found pacing the deck or sitting smoking together, and joined not at all in the various amusements that obtained among the other passengers.

The fourth day of their voyage was Sunday, and a colonial

bishop who was on board, having recovered from his sea-sickness announced his intention of preaching at the morning service a sermon in aid of the "Society for the Suppression of Betel-nut chewing among the Malays."

Somewhat to Straight's surprise he saw his friend in a chair in the front row.

"You did not expect to see me amongst our worthy friend's audience," remarked the political agent, when the service was over and the passengers had duly handed in their contributions, "but it always interests me to hear other people's views of our common end."

"I don't see much interest in it," replied Douglas. "We live, we grow old, we die. *Voilà tout*, and life is quite enough of a bore as it is without sermons to make it more so. And then things always have a habit of turning out the wrong way."

"Exactly so; but then you have never lived among the Easterns or studied their knowledge. You get disgusted with circumstances, forgetting that you yourself make circumstances, not circumstances you. To every man it is given to attain his desires, and if he fails he has himself to thank."

"There seems to be a remarkable lot of failures knocking about, then."

"True. People allow trivialities, sentiments, or other men's interests to get in their way. They often lose sight of their object altogether, then when they are old they spend their declining years in bewailing what might have been. By the way, did you observe that our friend the bishop is, though probably he does not admit it, a fatalist? 'Be good, and contented with what you have, so you will obtain heaven,' was the gist of his discourse."

"People's general idea of heaven," said Douglas, "is a place for oneself and one's friends. The rest, and those who have in any way offended us, go elsewhere."

"Exactly so. To every man his own ideas. That man," said Moncrieff, pointing to a Lascar, "hopes after death to live in a seraglio surrounded by black-eyed houri. *My* paradise will be—a place where there are no women."

CHAPTER V.

"What mighty ills have not been done by woman?"

The Orphan, Act iii. Scene 1.

STRAIGHT arrived too late to see his brother. When he reached Poona he found that Vincent had died the day before, and the funeral had just taken place. Collecting his brother's effects and settling the few matters of business required did not take long, and refusing all offers of hospitality he returned to Bombay, intending to start for Europe at once.

He was sitting idly in the verandah at Watson's, listening to the eternal cawing of the crows, which, as Madame Blavatsky tells us, are always drunk, when a letter was brought him. He opened it with some curiosity, as the writing and postmark were unknown to him.

It was from Moncrieff, asking Douglas to pay him a visit before he left India.

Now Straight had quite made up his mind to leave by the next day's mail, and when he read the letter he exclaimed, "Impossible." A two days' journey by rail in India just as the hot season is commencing is not exactly an agreeable undertaking, and Douglas hated discomfort.

He read the letter through again.

"After all," he thought, "why should I hurry back?"

Ordering a peg he drank it slowly, then a sudden inspiration seized him; descending to the hall he dispatched three telegrams. Calling his brother's body-servant, whom he had brought from Poona with him, he said:

"Take all the sahib's things to Grindlay's and return quickly. I am not going to Europe to-morrow." The man salaamed. "Afterwards pack my things; we start for Dallapore to-night."

When, two days later, Straight arrived at the little white-washed station, the terminus of the line, Moncrieff was on the platform to meet him. In his white clothes and pith helmet, he looked leaner and browner than ever, but his keen far-seeing eyes compelled the same feeling of attraction.

The station-master, a yellow, weedy-looking Eurasian, came out of his office and surveyed the new arrival with some curiosity.

"See that Mr. Straight's things are sent up by bullock-cart immediately," said the political agent curtly; then turning to Douglas, "My *tonga* is waiting, and we will start at once; it is a long drive up hill."

Straight was not a keen admirer of scenery, but he could not help being impressed by the beauties that met his eye at every turn of the narrow, winding road, up which the sturdy *tats* toiled, urged on by the white-robed *syces* who walked by their heads. The huge tree-ferns hung over the pathway, brilliant sun-birds chattered to each other and tiny grey squirrels darted to and fro.

At a turn of the path when they had gone about half-a-mile, a large yellow Irish terrier walked out of the jungle and sniffed suspiciously at the new-comer.

"My wife Lilith," said Moncrieff, speaking for the first time since they had left the station; "my friend Straight."

The dog stopped sniffing and, standing on her hind legs, licked Douglas' hands.

After nearly three hours' toil up hill, they came in sight of Dallapore, and, having reached the level, a brisk trot of half-an-hour brought them to the gates of a long rambling bungalow, with a Sepoy sentry on guard.

"Here we are at last," said the political agent, leading the way into the verandah, where iced drinks were awaiting them. "This is my home and I will introduce you to my family." He gave a low whistle, a pair of bright eyes and a sharp little nose appeared from a corner of the roof, and a small mongoose climbed carefully down, and running up Moncrieff's arm took up its position on his shoulder. Another whistle, somewhat longer and shriller, caused Douglas to start up with an exclamation of horror, for a large snake uncoiled itself from a chair just behind him, and sliding noiselessly over the floor coiled itself round its master's arm.

"My eldest son, Moti; he has lived with me for three years. You need not be afraid," continued Moncrieff, seeing Douglas did not resume his seat, "he is perfectly harmless."

But a sudden revulsion of feeling swept over Straight, for, as he looked at the snake's glittering eyes, they seemed to contain a strange likeness to the political agent's

The feeling was only momentary, however, and Douglas sat

down again and even patted Moti's head, though in a general way he loathed snakes.

"To-night we will rest," said Moncrieff, "and to-morrow I hope to be able to show you some sport."

They dined alone, the only other white man in the place being the doctor, and he was away on a week's leave.

The interior of the bungalow was comfortably furnished, and Straight marvelled at the great quantity of books. They appeared to be in all languages, but the greater part in Eastern tongues.

"A curious motto that," remarked Straight when, after a well-served dinner, they were smoking in the verandah, and he pointed to a scroll bearing the words, "Woman is the root of all evil."

The political agent smiled. "There are one or two others about," he said, and Douglas, turning his head, saw a similar scroll, and written thereon, "Never trust a woman."

"Well, I must say there is something in that," remarked Straight feelingly. "They are 'kittle cattle,' and awfully hard to understand." Then, thinking of his marriage, he waxed eloquent. "Yes, and they lead one into all sorts of foolish things too, and turn out utterly different from what one expects. But, if you are married, why, there is an end of it; you have burnt your boats behind you, and there is nothing to do but to grin and bear it."

Silence for a few minutes, broken only by the chirping of the crickets and croaking of the frogs.

Then the political agent laid aside his *kaliun* and spoke.

"I had a wife once," he said; "indeed, for the matter of that I have one now, for I have never heard of her death. You may, perhaps, wonder, in common with many others, why I remain in this out-of-the-way place, when I have been offered so many better appointments, and why I so rarely mix with my countrymen. I will tell you.

"Years ago, I have forgotten how long, I fell into that state of insanity called love. It is an epidemic which most of us take, and the world still waits for a Jenner to invent a vaccine which shall inoculate us against it. She was pretty, I know. We were married, and I don't suppose at that time that the world contained a greater fool than myself. All my energies, my abilities were employed for her. I studied hard from morning

till night, and worked like a slave to give her her heart's desires, horses, jewels, clothes and such trash as women love.

"One evening, I gave an entertainment for her pleasure. After supper, some fellows made a speech ; I had to return thanks. I rose to do so, and to gain an inspiration glanced across the table at my wife. She was looking at me with a smile on her lips, but her hand, loaded with my rings and jewels, lay clasped in that of the man next her.

"I got through my speech, I believe, for the people applauded, and then pleading sudden illness, retired. Even through the long vista of years I still remember what I suffered that night. But I was mad for I was in love. Next morning I saw my wife, who met me as if nothing had happened ; I told her what I had seen, and that she could go to her lover. She cried and prayed and said something about her innocence and my neglect, but I remained firm and she went away with him."

"And you were divorced?" asked Straight.

"No, I had had enough of matrimony ; I shall never want to marry again."

"But your wife?"

"She chose her path and had to take the consequences. I pay an allowance quarterly to her bankers, but have never had sufficient curiosity to inquire as to her whereabouts or mode of life. I have almost forgotten her existence."

"What became of the man?" asked Douglas.

The political agent drew himself up suddenly, his eyes seemed to flash fire, and Moti disturbed in his slumber gave a faint hiss.

"He is buried in the sands near Boulogne. I shot him through the heart."

The next day was devoted to sport, and Straight thought he had never seen so good a shot as Moncrieff, he seemed to hit everything he aimed at, and although game was not plentiful they had made a fairly respectable bag by the end of the day.

"Well," remarked Straight as they sat in the verandah after dinner, "if you are as good at everything else as you are at bringing down birds, I don't wonder at Government wanting your assistance."

"I go upon a simple principle," replied Moncrieff. "If I want

anything, be it a sand-grouse or an appointment, I set to work and never rest until I get it."

"Are you always successful?"

"Always. It may be long in coming, there may be apparently insurmountable difficulties in the way, but in the end I always succeed. Have you ever studied Napoleon's character? I admire it exceedingly; everything gave way before him simply by his power of will."

"He was a genius though," objected Douglas, "and a pretty unscrupulous one at that."

Moncrieff smiled. "Genius, as the copy-books tell us, is the capacity for taking infinite pains. As for scruples, let the man who indulges in them prepare to take a back seat. Do not a large proportion of Christians take for their motto, 'The end justifies the means,' and has not Darwin clearly expounded the doctrine of 'the survival of the fittest?'"

"It's rather a dangerous theory to go upon, isn't it? You might justify almost anything on those grounds. I daresay Napoleon did when he poisoned those prisoners at Acre. You would hardly approve of murder?"

"And why not?"

Douglas started; the same feeling of revulsion came over him again, but it passed instantaneously as Moncrieff fixed his eyes upon him.

"The idea of murder horrifies you! and very properly. In Europe the Decalogue prevails, which, perhaps, is just as well; but in the East things are different, and have been so from time immemorial. Here one cannot be governed by laws which are beneficial in other latitudes. Where do you find an unchanging standard of right and wrong? Is not the very act of murder praised and extolled in your bible?"

"Yes, that is all very well," said Straight; "but in Europe laws prevail, and one is bound by them, and in spite of your theory it is very hard to get on, especially if one makes a false step; you never seem to recover the ground you have lost."

"You are ambitious, then?"

"I don't know about ambitious. Every man, I suppose, has something he hopes to get, and I want to get to the top branch of my particular tree."

"And why not?"

"Well, to tell the truth, I've made a hash of affairs by marrying unsuitably. You see, a clever wife, who has plenty of tact and gets on well with the chiefs, is just the making of a fellow, and *vice-versâ*."

"And you, having failed to find that fabulous animal, a perfect woman, sit down and bemoan your fate. I never allowed a *man* to stand in my way."

"No, I suppose not. But not being a Napoleon I cannot summarily dispose of my Josephine."

"Mahmoud," said the political agent to the servant who entered the room just then with a tray of refreshments, "what have you done with Fatimeh?"

"Sahib, she caused much disquiet. Where she was there was no peace. I therefore returned her to her father's house. It is not good for men to live with such women."

"That foolish fellow," said Moncrieff, "having some spare cash, must needs buy himself a second wife. You have heard with what results. In some things these Orientals are distinctly ahead of us."

Douglas remained at Dallapore for ten days. He found the political agent a most interesting companion, and the nameless attraction grew stronger than ever. Without perceiving it he came gradually to adopt all Moncrieff's ideas and theories, absorbing them as a sponge does water, though had any one suggested that he had not always held those views he would have indignantly denied it.

When at last he took leave of the political agent and started for Bombay, he felt he was leaving one of his oldest friends. Arrived at Bombay, Straight looked in at the hotel on his way to the steamer. She was to sail at three, it was now half-past two; just time for a little welcome rest in the cool of the verandah and a decent lunch before going on board. There was the usual crowd of Anglo-Indians in the thinnest of tweeds and the largest of sun-hats, sitting round small marble-topped tables, smoking and having occasional recourse to the cooling drinks that in endless variety stood before them. The pleasures of imagination, restricted and repressed by exile, take for the Anglo-Indian two principal directions: the weirdness of his solar topee and the compound inscrutability of his drinks.

Through the motley crowd of money-changers, touts, guides

and jewellers that throng the tourist in such places, Straight made his way to one of the few vacant seats, at a table before which an imperturbable box-wallah was spreading out his glittering wares, and unblushingly demanding ten rupees for a white sapphire. His victim was a stout, white-whiskered, weather-beaten man, whose fifty summers had not brought him experience in stones. He acquired the stone, which was worth perhaps fifty cents, and was about to yield to the charms of a gold ring set with blue sapphires and brilliants, as Straight dropped into the chair beside him.

The Eastern jeweller conducts his business on simple principles. If a purchaser knows what he is about, a fair bargain will be driven. If he falls under the native denomination of "D——d fool passenger," fooled he will be to the top of his bent. It is after all but "Caveat emptor" writ large.

"Just picking up a few fal-lals for my wife," announced the stout man.

"Indeed," rejoined Straight with a polite assumption of faint interest.

"Ah, you haven't seen my wife! A fine woman, sir, a fine woman, a re-markable woman. The *belle* of Sydney. Have you seen Sydney Harbour? No. Ah! pleasure to come. Finest harbour in the world. I come from Sydney."

Just then the tiffin bell rung, and Straight went into lunch with a confused notion that the stout man was the most remarkable man in the world and owned Sydney Harbour.

CHAPTER VI.

"For where is any author in the world
Teaches such beauty as a woman's eye?"

Love's Labour's Lost.

THE "Ravenna" was twenty-four hours out at sea with a fine free roll on her, exhilarating enough to those that take fresh health from salt water, but eminently hateful to the jaundiced and sick. Mrs. John Trent was sitting on deck half reading and half dozing, enjoying in a dreamy semi-consciousness the swift motion of the ship, the splash and ripple of the water, and the flood of soft light from the setting sun. Mr. J. Primrose Trent was enjoying nothing at all, except, poor man, some intervals of

drowsy sleep. He was of those to whom it comes amiss to "go down to the sea in ships."

At dinner the evening before, Straight, sitting on the captain's left, had recognized across the table his stout friend of Watson's Hotel, and was fain to admit that the refined and graceful woman between him and the captain would be the *belle* of many a London drawing-room, not to speak of Sydney ones.

Introductions followed, and, having swiftly taken stock of the other passengers, Straight was not long in deciding that Mrs. Trent's society, if she would accord it, would amply suffice to lift the voyage above the usual dead level of boredom.

He came up to her now as she sat on deck, and as he did so noticed that the title of her half-closed book was in Italian. He took a seat beside her, and they chatted away of Italy and Italian pictures and sunsets and the bright life to be led in that pleasant land.

"I spent the happiest years of my life there," she said. "During the last five years of my father's life we lived at Florence. Dear, sleepy old place; I seem to see it now. The Duomo and Palazzo Vecchio, the market-place with the flower-girls, and the quaint old bridges over the Arno. It is a place one always remembers vividly, I think. Have you been there?"

"Yes, but only in the passing-tourist kind of way. I managed to put in a couple of days there when I was transferred to Rome. I am not sure that it isn't better to leave places entirely alone if one can't devote plenty of time to them; though some people seem to think that the essence of travelling consists in seeing the largest number of places in the shortest possible time. The outward and visible sign of this mental state is the guide-book. If you were to suggest to this school that it is possible to enjoy a picture or a cathedral without a Baedeker they would laugh you to scorn."

"Yes," said Mrs. Trent, laughing, "we used to notice them at Florence. They always looked anxious and in such a hurry. My father used to laugh and say he wondered why they didn't save their money and read about the places at home, for they would never form an opinion that wasn't in accordance with their books."

"The most advanced specimen of the guide-book and hurry crowd that I ever met was an American I ran up against before

I left India. He boasted that he had seen India in ten days, and no one was so ill advised as to argue with him. He had 'done' India, and there was an end of it. He was taking back with him a model of the Taj Mahal. A Chicago syndicate were going to erect a copy of it 'in red brick and the very best wrought-iron girders, right away.'" Straight imitated the slow, nasal intonation, and added: "The Taj in red brick! If there be any limit to modern vandalism that should about touch it."

"Yes," said Mrs. Trent in her soft, pleasant voice, "one would think so. It reminds one of the first French occupation of Italy, to which, as you know, the Louvre owes not a little. A French officer was standing one day near the Duomo, looking up at Giotto's campanile, when a small Florentine *gamin* asked him with great politeness whether that was the next object that the *signori* would dispatch to Paris. But tell me about Rome. I have never been there. It was the old story, always talking about it, but never going."

As she mentioned Rome, Straight's face clouded over as though with some unpleasant memory.

Just then the dressing-bell sounded.

"I must go and see how my husband is getting on," said Mrs. Trent rising. He followed her with his eyes as she disappeared down the companion, and then turned and watched the last glow of the setting sun slowly die out in the west.

That evening, and many other evenings after dinner, Straight sought out Mrs. Trent. The amateur concerts in the music-room were excellent, he thought, at a distance, and the small talk of the smoking-room had no special attraction. The rest of the passengers were not, indeed, an interesting set, though two of them offered some mild amusement to their fellows. Mr. and Mrs. d'Arcy-Hume were a newly-married couple. They were also third cousins to a peer of the realm. This fact was ever present in their minds. The responsibility it carries with it is, indeed, not to be under-estimated. Mrs. and Mr. d'Arcy-Hume decided on the safest line: they confined their conversation entirely to themselves. He was a callow and harmless youth, some seven years younger than his bride, and when he was not arranging her pillows or bringing her a new novel, he was ordering her a champagne cock-tail with touching solicitude

Mrs. d'Arcy-Hume had, indeed, indicated that she was prepared to make one addition to her limited visiting list ; but the Honourable Douglas Straight took a certain malicious pleasure in avoiding the happy pair.

"What a pity it is," he remarked one day to Mrs. Trent, "that that woman drinks so much. Bad enough in a man ; but he generally pulls himself together sooner or later. When it gets hold of a woman she simply goes headlong."

"A woman who drinks is one of the saddest sights in the world. We see and hear a good deal about it among men in the colonies, but the women are rarely addicted to it. I'm afraid one can't say the same about those in the old world. The racketty life and constant hurry and high pressure lead to a good deal of secret drinking among those who ought to be above such a vice. But I am only speaking from what I have read, and I think great allowance ought to be made for those who fall under its sway ; it is a kind of disease, and the sufferers have more need of the physician than the preacher."

"Why, Mrs. Trent, I believe you are one of those kind souls who regard crime as a mental aberration, curable by restraint and the culture of æstheticism. The Americans, I believe, have some establishments where forgers and housebreakers are educated to a taste for Italian opera and the old masters. The weak point in the system seems to be that the society they have injured have to pay the professors."

"I don't know that I go quite so far as that," she replied, raising her beautiful eyes towards his, "but I think that the best of us are not so good that we don't stand in need of great kindness and forbearance in the judgment of our fellows."

Just then a brisk youth, one of the sports' committee, without which no P. and O. voyage is complete, came up soliciting subscriptions. Straight promptly offered his guinea, "but on the distinct stipulation that he should be excused from taking any violent exercise in this frightful heat."

"They call this a free country, and one has to pay for the privilege of keeping cool," he explained to Mrs. Trent.

Mr. Trent was still confined to his cabin, and in the depressing solitude gave himself up to that somewhat morbid train of thought to which those are liable who have at any time lived much alone. His wife came to see him frequently, but her

departure only threw him back into fresh gloom. She had become indispensable to him. At the same time he felt now, as he had not felt before, that his marriage was not an unqualified success.

Absent from his wife he felt wretched, and in her presence he was not entirely happy. Incompatibility of education and tastes he had been semi-conscious of all the years of his married life. Within the last week something, some unknown quantity, had brought out the skeleton from its cupboard. Like King Hezekiah of old, John Trent groaned and turned his face to the wall. Meanwhile, the "Ravenna" was slipping along through the placid waters, now lying stretched out like some vast inland lake rather than a sea.

"Moonlight on the water always reminds me of Florence, and the Arno shining between the old bridges," said Margaret Trent to Straight, who was standing beside her smoking a cigarette in perfect peace and enjoyment. "We used to live in a pretty villa outside the town, from which you could see the town and the river. Sitting out on one of those mild evenings in June or July, it was very pleasant. Sometimes an Italian friend would play the mandoline and sing to us."

"You play and sing so well yourself, Mrs. Trent, it was rather unkind of you to delight us only once and no more."

"On board ship I dislike it. They rather expect it as a matter of course every night. Besides, I was so very fond of music in the old days, and—there are some things it is better to forget. That was my great ambition," she added after a pause; "I was going to study in Rome: then our home was broken up and my life changed. It is no good brooding over the might-have-beens of life."

"Not a bit," replied Straight, though the moody manner with which he threw away his half-smoked cigarette belied the cheerfulness of his tone. "I suppose in Australia you had little opportunity of developing your talent?"

"My father had little besides his pension. He had lost money through bad advice from a brother-officer. I never heard the details. When he died, my sister and I were left with next to nothing. I went to Australia as a governess; some rich Australians passing through Florence took a fancy to me. That is my story," she added with a little laugh.

"Thank you, Mrs. Trent," said Straight simply. Then they both lapsed into silence.

Next day the "Ravenna" passed under the lee of Socotra. Douglas Straight and Mrs. Trent stood watching it. The red sandstone crags and peaks and serrated summits glowed rich and warm in the sunset. The sea was gently washing its rugged shores, against which stood out one tiny white sail, the only sign of life visible. It was a pretty picture, but to Straight it brought the unpleasant reflection that they would soon be at Aden; the voyage was coming to a close. Conversations with Moncrieff rose to his mind. What a fool he had been. He had wrecked his life for a pretty face; he, with every advantage that birth, station and, for the matter of that, personal comeliness could give, had thrown himself away on the chance acquaintance of a midnight *rencontre*. That dream was over. He had married, as most men do, not the real woman, but the golden nimbus of abstract perfection that imagination had woven about her. And now he knew the real woman.

He had married a doll, and he had met his ideal; he was profoundly to be commiserated.

"It is rather an inhospitable island," said his companion presently, "and yet there is something about it as we see it now, that makes one think of the lotus-eaters and the 'so rest ye brother mariners, we will not wander more.'"

"And the land where all things are forgotten," added Straight.

"Couldn't fatten many sheep up there on those hills," said a rough voice behind them.

Turning round they saw Trent, somewhat yellow as to colour and shrunken as to form.

He had been watching them for some minutes with an expression half of pain, half of animosity. Some of his vague, morbid broodings in the cabin began to take more definite shape.

"Good-evening, Mr. Straight; glad to see you again. Just come up for a breath of fresh air. It's pretty clear that Bombay and prawn curries don't agree with me. I shan't be sorry to see what they call 'the blue waters of the Mediterranean,' though how they can be bluer than all the blue water we have seen since Sydney beats me. My wife looks well, but she always does. I told you," he went on with a smile, "that she was a re-

markable woman the first time we met." And in the recollection his vague feeling of mistrust of Straight disappeared.

"She's got a great hankering after Italy, has my wife. Her father, General Buckley, lived there years ago. If I can manage it, I've promised to take Margaret to Florence, but I've got a big bit of business to attend to first in London; and shiners before sentiment has always been my motto. Which reminds me there are a few calculations I want to make before they clear the saloon for dinner," and looking rather worried, John Trent disappeared down the companion.

Margaret Trent's eyes and Straight's met, but they said nothing.

At Aden, a letter was brought to Straight; it was from his wife. She had been very lonely without him and had been ill, and he must expect to see her changed. She was longing to see him and was ever his loving Alice.

The conventional words stung him. She was his wife, he could not get over that fact, and she still loved him. His love for her was dead. That did not make her less his wife. Under his breath he cursed the mad folly, as he now regarded it, that made her so. But he owed her at least gentleness and consideration. Poor pale-faced girl, the phantom of her former self. He need not make her more wretched than she was already.

At Brindisi, Straight said good-bye to the Trents; they were going by sea to Marseilles.

(To be continued.)

Our Irish Fortnight.

By ETHEL F. HEDDLE.

I WAS convinced, before starting, that the success of our Irish fortnight was assured. We were a party of three—the kindest, and wittiest, and best of aunts, Clarinda and myself. Aunt A. is one of those people who not only find good in everything and sermons in stones, but interest in everything, not to say humour; and Clarinda—well, Clarinda's friends all know her favourite occupation is to smooth the stony road, and pick the thorns from the roses, and to be the unselfish, and the tactful, and the good-humoured on all and every occasion. With these two I folded the wings of my spirit. I could afford to be cross, if so inclined, and that is a luxury not permissible always in a travelling party.

Well, we crossed from Greenock, armed by Cook's tickets, and at the very first step found that a mistake had been made somehow—how, we endeavoured vainly to discover. We had only single tickets in some cases and double in other, and the first thing was to sit down and go through said tickets, which included coupons for bed, breakfast and dinner at all the hotels we intended to visit. For ladies travelling alone in Ireland I beg to recommend these coupons. It saves time, and they certainly save money. And tips are included. The rate is, I think, ten shillings per day.

The crossing, though dreaded, was fine; and after a wild search for Cook's office in the rainy drizzle of the early September morning, and a wilder grapple after to understand the scheme of the tickets—"the nice, amiable clerk" in Edinburgh having hopelessly confused Aunt A.—we departed from Belfast for Portrush and the Causeway. Belfast, of course, needs no comment or description. It is so severely useful and prosperous and plain that one might as well grow eloquent over Glasgow. And I do not know if the writer lives who could do that. We reached Portrush about two, and there took the electric car for the

Causeway. The day had brightened into pale and rather cold sunshine, and Portrush was gay and golfing, and the sea, tossing below, had grand waves. We had lunched in the train, and then made a surreptitious cup of tea by means of Clarinda's genius and an extremely useful tea-basket, and we had not spilt the water, nor the cream, nor the methylated spirit, nor more than half of each cup of tea, so were quite refreshed and ready for the Causeway. The drive in the little electric tram was extremely fine. It ambles along by the edge of the road, and below was the sea rolling up in huge green waves, cream-edged. There are fine cliffs and fantastic sea-worn arches and, as we proceeded farther, the picturesque ruin of Dunluce. This castle seems to have gone through all sorts of vicissitudes and changed hands more than once. It was "grabbed" from an Irish M'Quillan by a greedy Scot, MacDonnel, who lost and regained it, and had an extremely stormy tenure of his stolen property, as he well deserved. A legend told in the vicinity is that under the kitchen there was a huge cavern, used for cooking purposes on high days, and that on one occasion, when there was an unusually large feast in progression, the floor of the kitchen gave way, and the entire band of cooks, the provisions and the fire were all precipitated into the cavern below, with disastrous results. And the consequence of this legend, which loves to enforce the moral of its tale, was that Lady Margaret MacDonnel was so alarmed by the incident that she quitted the castle, which fell gradually into ruins. She may, of course, have regarded the accident as poetical justice falling on her race; but I am sure, if she had been a Campbell and not a MacDonnel, she would have much more sensibly removed or rebuilt the kitchen. "The greed of the Campbell" would have been proof against even poetical justice. We reached the Causeway Hotel in a threatening drizzle, but, armed with umbrellas and waterproofs, and after absolutely refusing guides, we set off for Ireland's famous show-place. Scotch opinion, prejudiced of course, vows that its Staffa is far more wonderful than the Irish basaltic rocks; but we need not make comparisons, which are usually futile, and only tend to argument and loss of temper. We said these huge pillars reminded us of an organ factory; the highest pipes are about thirty feet above the level of the shore, and the smallest only one or two. Headlands of rain-drenched green stretched to right and left of us, while dimly in front might

be seen the coast of Scotland, "stern and wild," and lowering to the northward. The waves rose, great walls of green water, through which the little sunshine left flickered feebly, and they dashed their impetuous force over the pillars and far up over the rocks. To watch waves like these was always a curious fascination, and the time passed and the little sunshine fled altogether before we realized that darkness was closing in, and we had not gone beyond the Causeway, and seen neither "Grace Staples' Cave" nor the "Chimney Tops." We are not, however, of that insatiable type of sightseer who regards wet and fatigue with scorn as long as they "see everything," and as it was now a steady downpour, we returned to the hotel, where, after a comfortable *table d'hôte*, Aunt A. read from the guide book all the scientific details we ought to have known, and all the numericals always so dear to the heart of a sightseer of properly-balanced mind.

"About 37,000 pillars—not to speak of those people have carried off—and it says we could have had very curious specimens of 'the paleolithic and neolithic works of stone or flint.' Most admirable and curious! And only a few shillings each. Dear me, how moderate!"

"I saw a lot of rubbishy-looking stones," Clarinda remarked wickedly. "I prefer to keep my shillings for photos and bog-oak. The girls would not thank me for paleolithic curiosities," which was so hopeless a remark to make before a severe and probably geological or mineralogical old gentleman who was examining a fragment of rock by our side, that Aunt A. shook her head and said no more.

Next day we progressed, by train, to Dublin. We looked out for round towers on the way, but saw none, only—and here I quote Aunt A. again—"green, positively arsenically green grass, and potatoes and cabbages planted side by side, in a curiously miscellaneous manner;" and by nightfall we were in the capital. Our fatal tickets had caused wordy warfare again, and I had to grasp them from a sulky guard and count them firmly before his eyes; but we had grown so accustomed to explanation and argument that Aunt A. remarked she was "quite disappointed, it all blew over so easily"—an opinion we did not share. In Dublin, however, a lengthy visit to Messrs. Cook's agents put all right, and armed with the necessary additions, we left the office

and made our way to the museum. It was comforting to know the mistake had been entirely our own. I do not love museums. If I fall, henceforth, in the reader's opinion, I cannot help it. Neither does Clarinda love them. We spent too many holidays and Saturday afternoons while gay and giddy in the Industrial Museum in Edinburgh, and ate too many fossilized buns there ; but I must say Dublin has the finest collection I ever saw. I only wish I could tell a tithe of all we saw, for, as a caretaker told us, almost apologetically, as if he were begging our pardon for being our superior, "You know, ladies, there are more ancient gold ornaments here than in all the other museums in Europe!" These are indeed wonderful. Then we saw the brooch of Tara, and the remains of a corpse which had lain 2,000 years in the bog. From the museum we went to see Trinity College Library and the Book of Kells. It was almost as difficult to get Aunt A. from this as Clarinda, who adores shopping, from the bog-oak shops ; but I succeeded in doing both, and after a drive in the beautiful Phoenix Park, where we saw the hideous gash in the pathway which marks the spot of Lord Frederick Cavendish's murder, we wound up by going to "Arrah-na-Pogue" in the evening. It seemed quite the proper thing to do. Next day we visited the Castle and the Castle Chapel, where a guide of fearful and useful learning and solemnity, who gave us a Browning-like description of the symbols in the carving and stained glass, marched us round and pointed everywhere with a long wand. We all felt as if we were at school. "He is fast pulverizing me ; I feel as if I were reading 'The Ring and the Book,'" Clarinda wailed. "Let us go away. We would *not* dare give him a *six-pence* ! You could more easily tip the Prince of Wales. *Do* come ! These people are mesmerized. See that woman's frozen stare !" So we fled. Next day was Sunday, and we went to St. Patrick's, under the delusion that it was a Roman Catholic cathedral. Clarinda has not been abroad, and wished to see one. But Roman Catholic churches and Home Rulers were two things we had a great difficulty in finding. I have no doubt they exist, but an evil fate dogged our footsteps. For one thing, I think car-drivers, whom we chiefly questioned as to their views, are chary about explaining their politics, thinking these may affect their fares ; and Aunt A.'s provoked summary of the matter, after an unusually large extortion, was that for her part car-drivers,

porters, guides and beggars would certainly "cure her of Home Rule before she left Ireland." In the evening we tried in vain, again, to find a Roman Catholic place of worship, and wandered into a very fine Episcopal church, and next day we returned to St. Patrick's to examine it more closely. Dean Swift's monument is a plain and dreary black slab ; Stella, poor soul, having hers on the other side of the door. Poor solitary genius ! Poor loving woman ! there seemed a pall of gloom about them even here. The stalls in the choir are very fine, each with its knight's helmet and sword above ; but we had to leave ere long for lunch, and presently, from a crowded station, started for Killarney. In the train there seemed much excitement proceeding from the next carriage, and then we learned that Mr. O'Brien was there, returning to the bosom of his constituents. All the way along the route there was acclamation and now and then a speech. Clarinda hung out of the window, whence she was only driven by a reporter, who took her place ; but we could not hear much, except an excited voice and bawls of delight from the crowd.

The House of Lords was to "swallow" something—I believe he said "the leek," and Clarinda placidly inquired if the aristocracy were fond of onions, as she proceeded to make tea.

How we ever got out at Mallow, which is O'Brien's birth-place, and where fate had ruled we must change, I know not. The crowd surged wildly round the windows, but I drove a peculiarly spiky umbrella in the wraps straight before me, and the others followed in the pathway thus made, deaf to vituperation and "Be aisy there !"

Killarney's lakes and dells were reached that night, and how shall I begin to give you even the faintest idea of their charms ! As I write, a misty picture rises up before me, shifting like a kaleidoscope. I see our first drive through the dirty little town, and past bare-footed women, and men selling shillelaghs, into the lovely country road, where blackberries hung in ebony clusters and lined the way. I see the hills and the lake, and the rowan and the heather and the arbutus—such a wealth of luxuriant growth as was strange to us. I feel the soft kiss of the air. I hear the brogue of our car-driver as he tells us that he does "just what he can, my lady, in the winter ; just what he can." I watch the rosy-faced beggars running after us.

The Gap of Dunloe is a kind of second and wilder Glencoe

and we rode down it, after stopping for refreshment in the lonely little inn, under the shelter of the Purple Mountain. Then we lunched while being rowed down the lake, and saw Castle Ross, and heard the echoes, and feasted on nature and beauty till all speech left us. The delights of Killarney and Muckross, and Aghadoe, and the Herbert estate, and the deer forest, and the waterfalls cannot be painted in a brief article. Go and see them for yourself; no description can do them justice, even if this feeble pen could essay that task. We would fain have returned to the Black Valley and climbed even one of the Macgillycuddy Reeks, but our fine days had fled, and we had Glengarriff in view. That, too, is lovely beyond compare, and we stopped at Kenmare and Bantry, where a market was proceeding, and the town was full of soft-voiced women, in their long black cloaks, the nun-like hoods shading those wonderful gray-blue Irish eyes that are like the pure slate colour of the deepest part in one of their own lakes. From Glengarriff, the beautiful, to Cork, chiefly for the sake of Castle Blarney.

"I always longed to have charming manners!" Clarinda said that evening, in the Cork Hotel, as we counted our photos before the fire. "After I have kissed the Blarney Stone, I shall have a mixture of 'that repose which marks the caste of Vere de Vere,' combined with a sweet airy charm and tact which will make me welcomed everywhere."

"Yes, wrestle with the porters and the cab-drivers with your sweet airy charm," I said; but to this Clarinda demurred.

She said that might fling the delicate charm from her manner before we got home. But alas! only an acrobat or a fly can kiss the Blarney Stone now! It is on the outside of the wall on the battlements, and as several tourists have essayed the feat, thereby breaking, one a leg and one an arm, Clarinda sat down in despair and gave up the idea.

"I've only found shamrock once, myself, and only seen three round towers," she wailed. "I thought they abounded everywhere. I can't kiss the Blarney Stone and I've not yet been into an Irish Roman Catholic cathedral! Ireland is a distressful disappointment!"

"Look at the view, and as to-morrow is Sunday and this the centre of Catholicism, we'll try again for the cathedral to-morrow."

Next day Aunt A. came up cheerfully, saying she had seen a fine picture of St. Finn Barr's Cathedral, and *now* Clarinda would be pleased and satisfied. She was fated to be neither.

St. Finn Barr's, too, was Episcopalian! We enjoyed the beautiful service, but, like Toddy, "we wished to see" our especial "wheels go round." At dinner that night we sat next a pleasant-looking man, who glanced up in slight amusement at a speech of Aunt Annie's, as she searched about in the ice pail for a particular lump she wanted.

"Ireland," she announced, "is charming, quite charming; but if there are either Home Rulers or Roman Catholic churches in its breadth and length they hide their light under a bushel. That is all I say."

"We have such a fatal trick of *never* finding a building we are directed to," I suggested. "And we did see O'Brien! and there was that Parnellite on 'sweet Innisfallen' (Oh! *wasn't* it sweet?) who abused Mr. Gladstone! You know you closed the conversation after that."

"His daughter did not know the words of 'The Wearin' o' the Green!'" she retorted. "Fancy a Scotch girl not knowing 'Auld Lang Syne!'"

And then I saw our neighbour's eyes twinkle and, very politely, he offered to lead us that evening to service at the Catholic church; we would be pleased, too, he said, to know that he was a Home Ruler and that the species really did exist. So Clarinda got her desire; we heard an extremely eloquent sermon, and the singing was beautiful. The choir concluded with a sweet old hymn I had heard before, sung by lips that are very dear:

"Mother of Christ, star of the sea,
Pray for the wanderer, pray for me,"

and outside the church our polite friend was waiting, and saw us back to the hotel.

Next day we returned to Dublin, where Aunt A. desired a final peep at the enchantments of the museum, and thence we made our way to Belfast again.

We left the shores of the Emerald Isle with the deepest regret; we could have lingered in Killarney for weeks. It was late September, but the soft humid air was as balmy as June, and oh! the tangle of ferns, and heather, and bracken on the rocks! The shadows creeping up the mountain, and the desolate gran-

deur of the Black Valley! After all, regretful memory pardons the beggars and the ingratiating scamps on the road, who even charged for helping us over a huge puddle in a hand-cart—which puddle, we shrewdly suspected, was kept full for the purpose—we pardoned everything; there was so much for which to be grateful.

And we have put away as our own for ever certain cherished and beautiful memory pictures. Ruined Muckcross Abbey, where the green fronds of the harts'-tongue crept everywhere, and peeped through the cracks in the tombs. Aghadoe, solitary above the placid blue of the lake: the sad-eyed woman who gathered shamrock for us, by the broken round tower close by, and showed me the holy basin, ruined, but never empty, she said, even in the longest drought. Killarney's lakes! "Sweet Innis-fallen!" where, against a background of holly trees 2,000 years old and arbutus and ferns, we gazed down on the lake, while Aunt A. deciphered the Runic characters on the tomb-stones in the deserted abbey. Glengarrif! Bantry! They rise up in a host at the very name of Ireland; and we only drank a drop from the great pitcher of her beauty!

The little fortnight! I could return and return, and so say all three of us.

"I have come back to my Home Rule principles," Aunt A. says. "The cardrivers' charges and the beggars' pertinacity have melted into a pleasant distance, and I am as staunch as ever. And Ireland is not distressful, she is beautiful."

"But I wish I could have kissed the Blarney Stone," Clarinda concludes. It is the sole disappointment she can offer now, so she dwells upon it. I tell her, if Pythagoras is correct, she may one day develop into a bird or a spider, and then she can gain her heart's desire after all.

A Fair Hindoo.

By JOHN H. WILLMER.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE CAPTURE OF YAKOOB'S STRONGHOLD.

As night set in, sounds of revelry issued from the fort. Nor did these sounds cease till about one in the morning.

The soldiers slept. Not so Vincent and the guide. Both were too excited even to lie down and rest.

As soon as a hushed silence fell over the fort, Ali, to the delight of the doctor, declared the moment for a move had come.

Led by the guide, the troops advanced in quite a different direction to the one taken by the three men on the morning before, and after half-an-hour's tortuous travelling, the ascent of the hill on which the fortress stood, began.

Presently, Ali called a halt.

"Sahib," said he, addressing Major Hoyles, "in front of us, here, is a sally-port, which the Doctor Sahib and I will open from within. The walls themselves are not high, but are made so by the precipitous rocks on which they are builded. Now my plan is this: Vincent Sahib and I will, by means of a ladder I have with me, enter the fort. We will open the sally-port for you, but you must not enter. For it will be difficult, the garrison being aroused, to rescue Missy Helen. If in half-an-hour, or say an hour, you hear not of us, then enter; or in case of firing, rush to our assistance."

Major Hoyles thought Ali's a wise plan, indeed; and he said so.

Leaving the major, the guide conducted Vincent to the east side of the fort, and here, placing a bamboo ladder, which he had taken care to bring with him, against the wall, he ascended. After him Vincent followed immediately. Once up, the guide ordered the doctor to lie flat on the ramparts, while he slowly crept to where, on the inside, a sentry leaned on his rifle.

Just now the moon peeped from behind a black cloud, and, a

beam emanating from it, bathed Ali in light, as he stood over the sentry, his rifle clubbed in his hand. In an instant the weapon descended on the head of the sleepy soldier, braining him. The rifle of the man struck on a stone, causing the steel barrel to ring out.

Immediately, from a distance, came the challenge: "Who's there?"

Equal to the occasion, the guide personated the soldier, and answered: "All's well!" then carelessly hummed a tune.

Half-an-hour later, Vincent was following Ali to the sally-port, which the latter opened. Still hugging the wall to keep within its shadow, the men hurried on. Almost at every turn they encountered drunken soldiers, some staggering along, in their filthy condition, unable to find their houses; others stretched on the roads powerless to move. Some, again, broke the still night with cries, curses and groans; while, occasionally, a verse or two of a song was sung out in a husky voice.

Successfully escaping detection, Ali brought Vincent to the house in which Helen was confined. Here a difficulty presented itself. How were they to gain the inclosure? The walls surrounding the building were high, and Ali had forgotten to bring the ladder with him. There was no time to go back for it, as in two hours or so more it would be getting light. Ali stooped down, and Vincent, getting on to his back, managed to hold on to the top of the wall. This was all he wanted. He easily pulled himself up and then assisted Ali. The descent on the other side was easier, the height being scarcely six feet.

"*Shabash!*" exclaimed Ali. "*Allah* has favoured us. *Alhamdo Lellahi!* Praise be to God! That is the room: the one from which the light comes."

Vincent advanced to an open window and looked in. At a second window, directly opposite the one he was looking through, sat Helen, gazing out into the black morning. Her cheeks were pale. He noticed this as she not unfrequently turned her face towards him and looked about the room as if dreading the approach of some one she momentarily expected. The wind played with her hair, which floated about her in wild confusion and at times acted as a sable veil to partially conceal her beautiful face. She looked upwards to the dark sky and watched one by one the lamps of heaven go out. She sighed, for

she knew morning was at hand. And what a morning! She was going to be forced to become a Mohammedan and marry Yakoob. She sobbed aloud in her despair, then she prayed God to send her father or Vincent to save her. "Vincent, dear Vincent," she muttered; and the answer came, "Helen." She trembled in every limb. Was she dreaming? Was she mocked? She had hardly expected a reply. To make sure it was no delusion, she again called, "Vincent!"

Once more the answer:

"Helen!"

No longer in doubt, the girl sprang from her seat and rushed across the room.

"Vincent, you here?"

"Hush, Helen! Yes, 'tis I, Vincent."

"How did you find me?"

"Not now. I'll tell you afterwards. Don't be frightened. Trust yourself to me. There!" as he lifted her out of the room.

Vincent took Helen by the arm and quickly followed the guide to the wall. Ali ascended first. Immediately he crouched down, for a sentry was making his rounds. When the soldier had gone, Vincent assisted Helen up, and then he followed. In the same order the descent was made.

"Who's there?"

From the darkness, to their left, came the challenge.

The soldier, on hearing a noise, had returned.

By way of an answer, Ali raised his rifle and sent a bullet through the man's heart. He dropped dead.

"On! On!" cried Ali, rushing through the darkness, closely followed by Vincent and Miss Hoyles, the latter, fleet as a deer, keeping close by the doctor's side.

The garrison was aroused, and some parties commenced firing. Several men also rushed ahead of the guide, who, pretending he too was in pursuit, shouted:

"Quick! They are escaping! On in front!"

"Who are escaping?" demanded a soldier, mistaking the guide for one of them.

"Traitors! Quick! On!"

The soldiers dashed ahead at a furious rate, and, on turning an angle, were met by a party coming their way. Each

mistaking the other for the enemy, opened fire. Many dropped dead in the first volley.

Meanwhile, Hoyles, hearing firing, remembered what Ali had told him and entered the fort. Now he gave the word, "Charge!" and the men, with a ringing, "Hurrah!" dashed forward to Vincent's help.

"Here they are, major!" exclaimed Shilstone, as he rushed to meet Vincent. "All right, old boy? Got Miss Hoyles?"

"Here she is."

"I am very glad, Miss—er Hoyles; you are all—er ——" stumbled Shilstone in his speech, quite confused.

"No time for making speeches," said Hoyles, laughing. "Our work is cut out for us."

Helen was given in charge of six trusty soldiers, and by them carried to the camp in the woods, while Vincent and the guide joined in the struggle.

The fight at the chief's house was hottest. There, in the hall below, the robbers fought like very demons. Higher, and yet higher, grew a rampart of dead and dying; while the floor became slippery with blood and the atmosphere hot and stifling. Ali fought by Vincent, and many were the efforts made by them to get at Yakoob, who, unconscious of the vicinity of such deadly enemies, cheered on his followers and fought with the courage of a lion.

As Vincent was mowing a lane to the Khan, a native soldier near him had his brains blown out; the *débris* of flesh and bone nearly blinded the doctor. In that moment he would have fallen to the stroke of a Mohammedan who had seized the opportunity of getting rid of so fine a swordsman—for such, in truth, Vincent was—had not a young soldier parried the blow, and with a second stroke killed the man.

British valour and discipline began to tell. Slowly the robbers gave way. Now, Yakoob, calling to him some of his men, sprang up a staircase communicating with a room overhead, and from there fired into the struggling mass below, both British soldiers and robbers falling to every discharge.

Vincent saw that something must be done. He looked around for Major Hoyles and saw that officer engaged with a crowd of the robbers. No help could be had from him, so, calling to Ali, and collecting a few native and English soldiers, he rushed

outside the building with these. The robbers raised a shout of victory.

The sun had now risen and the carnage within the hall was a dreadful spectacle to those outside.

"Ali," said Vincent, "you know the geography of this building. Can't you lead us up there?" pointing to the storey above.

"*Inshallah!* What an owl not to think of it," and he dashed forward, followed by Vincent and the soldiers.

To the rear of the palace they went, where there was an unguarded staircase, and up this the men scrambled to the top storey. For awhile the men stayed to breathe and load their rifles. Then Vincent led them forward and gave the word, "Fire!"

Many and many a robber rolled over to this deadly volley. The courage of the rest was completely demoralized, and they broke and fled.

Yakoob, as if by a miracle, escaped unhurt, and fighting his way outside, he ran towards the battlements, but a few yards off, completely deserted by his men, who fled towards the gate of the fort, hotly pursued by Hoyles and his men.

"He flees! He flees!" cried the guide, pointing with his sword towards the retreating Yakoob. "By the sacred waters of *Zem-Zem*, I swear I'll drink his blood!" and rushing down the stairs, he gave chase to the chief.

They met on the walls, and with bitter oaths engaged in a death struggle.

"Son of a dog!" cried the guide, cutting at Yakoob with his sword, "Take that!"

"Yea, *Allah!* A woman's hand!" jeered the Khan, as he adroitly parried the blow and, in turn, cut at his opponent.

Blade met blade, but with such force did Yakoob deliver his stroke that Ali's sword was wrenched from his hand and sent whirling into the air. Now Yakoob tormented Ali, who was at his mercy. With a clever stroke he cut off the man's right ear. Then he stabbed him all about the body, taking care, however, not to pierce too deep, and to avoid every vital part.

While this "cat and mouse" play was going on, Vincent watched the issue of the fight from below. He knew he was powerless to help Ali. If he made as if rushing towards the combatants, he guessed Yakoob with one stroke would terminate

this now one-sided fight. If he but had a pistol or rifle with him, he could easily have picked off the robber. But, alas! at the moment he possessed neither.

All this time Ali dodged about, trying to wrestle with the Khan, who, however, kept him at a distance by means of his sword.

Having, with the eye of an artist, carved on the naked breast of Ali various shapes and forms, Yakoob lifted his sword to put an end to his amusement, for he knew he must be away. He had seen Vincent, and with his eye measured him. He calculated on an easy victory. His face lit up with a revengeful smile as he flourished his heavy sword above his head; the air whistled as he did so. Now, as he was about to cut at the uncovered head of Ali with all his might, he paused and changed colour.

"Did I not shoot you?" he asked.

"It looks like it," sneered Ali. "Thoo! You pride yourself on being a marksman, and I was but a hundred yards away and you missed me."

"See if I'll miss you now," he shouted angrily, as his sword descended through the air. Ali had waited for this patiently. He nimbly sprang aside to escape the blow; then, before the Khan could recover his guard, sprang in and grappled with him.

The sword to Yakoob was now useless. So, casting it aside, he put forth all his strength to prevent himself being hurled over the battlements, for the fortifications, on this side, were built on a natural wall of rock, rising sheer up from a depth of 2,543 feet.

Backwards and forwards the men swayed as each tried to hurl the other over. With arms coiled around one another's body, they stumbled from point to point.

Vincent looked on speechless from below.

Ali, of the two, was the stronger, and were it not that he had lost a quantity of blood, the struggle would, ere this, have terminated in his favour. As it was, he gradually edged the Khan to the very brink of the precipice. Here, for awhile, both remained locked in each other's arms; and, to Vincent, they appeared as if figures cut in stone, so motionless were they. Yet, at this moment, each was measuring to the utmost his strength with that of his opponent. This could be seen from the swelling muscles of their thighs and arms and from the tightening of every vein in their necks and faces.

Soon Yakoob's body bent slowly backwards. Yet his feet kept their place. Lower and yet lower his huge frame sunk, till his face was turned upwards. Now, like a mighty tree uprooted by angry winds, which in vain strove to break it asunder, did this man's feet give its hold, and striking Ali, broke his balance, and together the men fell headlong downward into the deep ravine.

Vincent rushed up, and, leaning over, saw both, still locked in each other's arms, bounding from rock to rock. Presently they separated, and one was thrown here, the other there, and were lost in the jungle below.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE REV. MR. WHITE OPENS THE SEALED PACKET PLACED
IN HIS HANDS BY CHARLES EDWARDS.

DURING the struggle which took place in Yakoob's palace, a native soldier—it was too dark to see what he was like—fought constantly at Vincent's side. Several times he saved the doctor's life, and, in fact, fell, pierced by a sword, receiving the thrust which had been meant for Vincent. There was no time to see who it was, or whether he was killed or wounded; but now that the fight was over, Vincent remembered the brave soldier and he hurried back to search for him. It would not be difficult, he knew, to distinguish him from the others, because of a long grey overcoat he wore.

As soon as he entered the hall, where lay the dead in heaps, testifying to the stubborn nature of the fight, Vincent at once saw the man he came in search of. He was lying among a heap of slain, with his cap drawn over his face. Vincent stooped to examine him. He leaped to his feet with a cry; then was on his knees again, whispering, "Devaki! Devaki!"

Yes; it was Devaki who had fought by the side of Vincent. She had been left at the camp in the woods, but had escaped, and putting on a soldier's coat had found her way into the fort and to Vincent's side.

In a little while, Devaki opened her eyes, but seeing who it was that was kneeling, with moist eyes, by her, she closed hers again, ashamed to look the doctor in the face.

"Devaki!" cried Vincent.

"Sahib," said the girl in a feeble voice, "do not speak to me.

You ought to be ashamed of me for—for—wearing men's clothes."

"Ashamed ! Have you not—did you not save my life ? Never has any woman shown for man such a love as yours, Devaki."

"Believe it not, sahib. Helen loves you."

"Peace. *You* are mine."

"I am dying. Nay, do not say no, because I feel it and am glad. Now shall I escape Ali——"

"He is dead."

"*Dead !*" cried the girl, attempting to sit up.

"Yes," answered Vincent, and he told her how Ali and Yakoob fell into the ravine.

The girl closed her eyes. But she told not Vincent of the thoughts that tormented her then. Here was she free, and she could be, without breaking her word, Vincent's wife ; but would she live ?

She allowed Vincent to examine her wound in silence ; but when he had finished, she asked :

"Will I live, sahib ?"

"Devaki," cried Vincent, after a pause, "I cannot lie to you. You have not many hours to live."

"God's will be done," she murmured. Then added, "Carry me from here, sahib. This room has a sickly look about it."

The soldiers were already out with stretchers, to carry away the wounded, and Vincent had Devaki carried to an empty house close by, while he went around binding up the wounds of the injured soldiers. This took him several hours to do ; and when he returned to Devaki, he found Shilstone and Hoyles there, and to them he told of Devaki's heroism and of the death of Ali and Yakoob.

The girl's bravery and love touched the two men to the heart, and kneeling down, Hoyles sobbed aloud—a thing he had not done since he was a child.

"Weep not, sahib," said Devaki. "You cry as if I were a child of yours, and not——"

"Devaki," said Vincent, forgetting his promise to Hoyles, "you are his daughter."

"Hush," cried the major, springing to his feet. But Devaki had heard Vincent, and she asked :

"Sahib, I his daughter ? Tell me quick, sahib."

Hoyles hesitated.

"Tell her all," said Vincent. "She has not many more hours to live."

Hoyles lifted his hands from his face and said :

"You are right ; I must—it is my duty to tell her now. Wait till Helen comes. I have sent for her."

The reader is perhaps not aware, their names not being mentioned before, that the Rev. Mr. White and Mr. Jones accompanied the troops—the former to administer to the souls of the soldiers ; the latter to procure "copy" for his paper. These two gentlemen now accompanied Helen into the fort and entered the sick chamber. Devaki's eyes opened wide with pleasure on seeing the clergyman. During the march they had had long talks together on religion, and now Devaki wished to be baptized. This ceremony over, Hoyles commanded the attention of those present to a story he had to tell them. The first part of it, about Hoyles' friend marrying a Hindoo lady, has been already told in Chapter III. of this novel, and so the reader's time need not be wasted by giving it again here. The rest of the story is new, and shall be given in the major's own words, as recorded by Vincent in his diary.

"If you will remember," continued Hoyles, "I said the man who lost his wife in so remarkable a way was a friend of mine ; let me correct myself—he was my son. Now listen to the base, ignoble part I played : I worked so that my wife appeared to be the wretch and not I. True, she forged the letters, but I it was that compelled her. After my son's wife had been stolen from him, I and his mother returned to England, for my regiment was stationed there. We took back with us our granddaughter, my son's child by a former marriage. She was only two years old then, and her mother had died in giving her birth.

"As soon as we reached England, I sent my granddaughter to America, to some of our relations there.⁶ I had hardly done this when my son, having sold out, arrived. My wife pleaded for him ; and my son, on his knees, begged of me to tell him where his wife and child were. But such was my foolish pride in those days that I upbraided him for—as I argued—disgracing our family, and said his marriage was no marriage. He leaped to his feet at this, his face all aglow with indignation. 'She is my lawful wife,' he cried, 'just as much as my mother is yours.'

"'Wife or no wife,' I returned, 'she will never be owned by me.'

"'I don't want you to,' he replied. 'Where is she? That is what I want from you.'

"'You have come to the wrong person,' said I, lying. 'Ask your mother.'

"My son turned to his mother, but he saw the look of surprise in her face, and he jerked around to me again, and hissed, 'Liar!' My whole body shook with anger, and I pointed to the door.

"'If he goes,' threatened my wife, 'I go with him.'

"I cursed them both and bid them never darken my door again. I soon discovered that my son was making preparations to go out to America to get his daughter, and then return to India. Now mine was, in those days, a revengeful nature. I directed that my granddaughter should be returned to me. This precaution was needless, for the vessel that brought her also arrived with the news that my wife and son had perished at sea. I learnt soon afterwards, however, that this was not the case, and both were safe in America.

"Soon after receiving this news, I set sail for the Cape, taking my granddaughter with me. While out here my regiment was sent to India and I received orders to join it, which I did, after sending my granddaughter back to a good school there. I was now stricken with remorse, and I tried to obtain forgiveness by finding my son's wife and his daughter. Of my wife and son I had lost all trace till, twelve years ago, I learnt from a friend of mine that my son was in India, and my wife intended joining him soon, and had booked her passage in the 'Silver Queen.' That boat, after leaving England, was never heard of more. Of my son I have still found no trace, and my belief is, he has returned to England."

A long silence followed. Then Mr. White made a few remarks, and told the major to "cheer up," and that God would surely pardon his sins after the way he had striven to repent and mend matters. Then Vincent said :

"Major, there is one point yet not clear to me: the likeness between Helen and Devaki."

"They are sisters. Helen is my granddaughter. I took her over to the Cape with me; stole her, in fact, from her father. I dreaded this question being asked, for I know Helen will now despise me."

"Never!" cried Helen, throwing herself into the old man's arms. "You have been good and kind to me. And if you treated my father badly, you have spent the better portion of your life atoning for it. What were my mother and father like?" asked Helen, changing the subject.

"These are their photos—though very small ones," said Major Hoyles, opening a locket suspended from his chain. Mr. White, who was looking over Hoyles' shoulder at the photos, exclaimed:

"What! That's Charles Edwards."

"That's my son's likeness," said the major stiffly.

"Let me see it," asked Vincent. "Yes," he cried; "the very image of Charles Edwards and—as I once before remarked to you, Mr. White—of Devaki's father."

"Devaki's father? Where did you see this photo?" asked Hoyles.

"At Jaggoonath's. It was stolen with his money. By-the-bye, have you found the papers Jugg. referred to when he was dying?"

"No," replied Hoyles. "They have been burnt, I am told. But this Edwards—who is he?"

"A young stranger who died in India."

"Did he leave no papers—nothing?"

"I have them here," said Mr. White, and taking out a sealed packet from his pocket-book, he showed them what was written on the envelope, to explain his reason for not opening the packet before.

As he tore away the cover, three photos dropped to the floor. Two were like the miniature photographs exhibited by Hoyles; the other was a likeness of Devaki's mother. Hoyles almost fainted at sight of these. Some water was brought him to drink, and he was made to lie on a bench in the room.

"I am better," he whispered. "Read! Read!—Great God!—My son died at Mariepoor and I knew it not. This is indeed punishment."

The Rev. Mr. White did as he was bid. The following is a summary of the contents of the packet:

After being driven from his home, Charles Hoyles* and his mother set sail for America; not in the boat that went down, but in another. They had booked their passages in the former

* Charles Edwards.

but had fortunately missed the vessel, and did not leave England till the following week. Now, neither knew whereabouts their relations were, and America being a big place, they knocked about for months, but at last found the correct address. But, to their disappointment, they found that Helen had been sent back. Once more to England they returned, to discover that Hoyles had sailed for Africa.

Charles thought it the better plan to leave his father alone for awhile and to go out to India, before more time was lost, and look out his wife and daughter. He accordingly (leaving his mother in England) sailed for India. Before doing so, however, the better to throw his father off his guard, he changed his and his mother's name to Edwards. He was shipwrecked off the coast of Spain, but this was not the only interruption to his voyage to India, for on getting to France he was unjustly accused of being connected with a gang of robbers, and cast into prison. For years he lingered there, till at length, owing to the intervention of a French officer whom he knew in India, he was liberated. That same officer furnished him with the means of getting a passage out to India. The ship touched at the Cape. Charles made inquiries about his father, and learnt that he was in India. On landing in Bombay, he heard that his father was in Mhow, and there he went to plead with him once more, hoping that time had softened his heart.

Here Charles Hoyles' diary came to a close, but Mr. White completed it by saying :

"Mr. Hoyles, or Charles Edwards as he called himself, did actually come to Mariepoor, but, alas! cholera attacked him and he died soon. Why it was he did not make inquiries of either the doctor or me about his father, Mr. Hoyles, I cannot say; but now, calling to mind the last moments of the deceased, he thought it, I imagine, better to go to his rest with the hope that his father had repented him of what he had done, because I remember hearing him say: 'Shall I send for him? I am sure he will tell me what I want to know now.' Then he paused a second to think, and said—still speaking to himself—'No, I'll die happier hoping he has repented.'

"A few seconds later his spirit fled.

"Now," continued Mr. White, "there is something I wish to tell you. Perhaps you will call it instinct, but I, the hand of

God: Miss Hoyles regularly placed flowers on the grave of her father, little knowing then that in such relationship he stood to her."

"It is strange," said Helen. "I little knew, indeed, who lay there."

"And I have never placed a flower on my father's grave," said Devaki. "Helen—sister—I cannot do it now. But you—will you before you sail for England, for I hear you are going home immediately, will you place a little wreath in my name?"

A kiss and a choking sob was the answer.

CHAPTER XXXII.

DEATH OF DEVAKI.

BOTH Vincent and Major Hoyles had much to do that day. The former had to attend to the wounded; the latter to the prisoners. The bodies of Yakoob and Ali, fearfully mutilated, were recovered from the ravine and buried, with the other Mohammedan soldiers and robbers killed, in a common grave outside the fort. At some distance from the fort, under a large tree, the European soldiers who were killed in the storming of the robber stronghold were buried side by side, in separate graves, after the funeral service had been read over them by their chaplain.

Now there were many women in the fort, and Hoyles was puzzled how to dispose of them. They were all collected in the Khan's harem. Hoyles shifted this unpleasant task on to the shoulders of Vincent. To the doctor's surprise, he found the women not a bit afraid or shy, nor were they averse to showing their faces.

"What are we to do with you all?" asked Vincent. "Some of you have lost your husbands." (With the ends of their *saris*, the women wiped away imaginary tears.) "Would you like to go back to your relations?"

"I would like you to marry me," said a young and pretty creature, one of Yakoob's wives.

"I cannot do that," said Vincent, smiling. "But I have an idea. Would you like to marry some of our Mohammedan soldiers?"

"Oh, yes! Oh, yes!" came the ready cries.

"Come on out, then," said Vincent, and he led them into the open. Shilstone collected all the marriageable young Moham-medan soldiers and drew them up in a line facing the women. On the word of command, "Charge!" they were to rush forward and seize whoever they liked. Never with such promptitude, or such lightness of spirit, with such shouts and laughter, was a charge made before by these men. And there was such dodging on the part of the pretty girls to escape ugly soldiers and be captured by men who were good-looking or passable. In five minutes time every woman there had a supporter, and before evening all were made man and wife by their priest.

As soon as the "charge" was over, Shilstone linked his arm within that of Vincent and said:

"Tell me, old fellow—is there no hope for Devaki?"

"None."

"I am so sorry for you."

"What's making you look so gloomy?"

"Ah, well, I've not caught my fortune."

"What do you mean?"

"Yakoob went and got killed by Ali, instead of by me—and the reward of course goes to no one—or to every one. My marriage day is very far off now."

"But you'll get a share of the loot."

"I did not think of that. How much has been collected?"

"I don't know. Look here, Shilstone; you must excuse me. I must go and see what Devaki is doing."

"By all means, go. Ta-ta!"

Hoyles and Vincent were in and out of the room in which Devaki lay the whole of that day, looking in to see how she was, and then attending to other business. Devaki slept for the greater part of the day, while Helen and Mr. White watched and prayed by her bed. Towards evening she awoke and called her friends around her, and bid each in turn good-bye. Jones' eyes were moist as he gallantly stooped and kissed the girl's hand.

Devaki noticed his wet eyes, and she said:

"Sahib, why do you cry?"

"Ask me not to speak," implored Jones, and he rushed away to hide his tears.

"Poor man!" exclaimed Devaki. "He has the soft heart of

a woman. And now, sahibs," she continued, "I wish to be alone with Vincent Sahib and my sister."

When all had left the room except the doctor and Helen, Devaki took the hand of the one and the hand of the other and joined them.

"Promise me," she said to Helen, "that you will marry Vincent Sahib."

"I cannot. If you live—as I hope you will, Vincent will——"

"I'll not live. Ask the sahib, here, and he'll tell you, as he has already told me, that I have not many more hours to live. So, promise me."

"I promise."

"And you, sahib, will you not promise?"

"Devaki, do not ask me such a question. Remember, I am engaged to you."

"I know. I know also that your love for me is the love of a brother for a sister. But you are noble and generous, and would marry Devaki because of your promise. Think not to hurt me by promising. I shall die happily instead. Promise me, sahib."

"I promise."

"Now I'm happy. Before I became a Christian—nay, I was a Christian before to-day, for I was baptized when a baby—I mean, before I knew what became of our souls when we died, I was unhappy. But now I'm full of gladness, for I hope to meet you all again."

After a few minutes, she asked :

"Where will I be buried?"

Neither Vincent nor Helen could command their voices to answer her, and she said :

"Tell my grandfather to bury me outside the fort. This place is so full of wickedness."

Vincent simply bowed his head.

"And now I have yet one thing more to do: make my will. Call in the sahibs again."

Major Hoyles, Shilstone and Jones re-entered the room. Jones wrote the will to Devaki's dictation, and then Vincent and Shilstone placed their signatures to it. Devaki left all her lands and houses to Helen. This done, Devaki said :

"I'm tired, I wish to sleep."

All, save Helen, retired from the room. Vincent went away

for a little while to attend to some of the wounded men, and then returned and watched by Devaki's bed. Hoyles, too, came in later on. Towards midnight, Devaki awoke, but kept awake for a short while only, and then slept without a break till about 4.30 a.m. Vincent examined her, and found she had but an hour or two to live now. Devaki saw the colour fade from his face and she guessed the cause.

"I have not many hours to live—have I?" she inquired, without a quiver in her voice.

"Two or three hours—at the most, four," answered Vincent.

"Has Mr. White come?"

"I am here," replied the clergyman, as he stepped into the room. He soon changed his black coat for his surplice, and celebrated the Holy Eucharist. All in the room, beginning with Devaki, received. The scene was a most solemn one.

As soon as the celebration was over, Mr. White went away to administer the Sacrament to some of the wounded soldiers who, too, were dying.

"Is it dark yet?" inquired Devaki. "Has the sun not risen?" Vincent threw open the windows.

"I see a faint light behind those hills," remarked the doctor.

"I wonder if I shall see the sun rise," said Devaki.

There was no answer to her question.

"Do you think, Helen, I'll be able to see you and watch over you from where I am going?"

"That is my firm belief."

"I am so glad. It makes one less timid, now, to face the darkness. Grandfather, come close to me; I cannot see you standing there. I am going soon. May I tell my mother that you have forgiven her?"

"Eh? What do you say?"

"I shall see my mother, shall I not?"

Vincent whispered something to Hoyles.

"Yes;" he said to Devaki, "tell your mother that I am sorry for what I did to her."

"I'll not forget it." Then, after a pause:

"And may I tell our father, Helen, that you regularly placed flowers on his grave?"

Helen could not answer her, but burying her face in Devaki's bosom, wept.

"The sun is just rising," said Vincent, knowing of nothing better to say.

"Is it?" asked Devaki. "It looks to me as if it were getting darker. Lift me, Vincent, that I may peep out and see the day-break—the last—the very last on earth."

Vincent, placing his arm around her, supported her while she gazed out of the window and watched the golden orb slowly creep up the back of a distant hill and shoot out its rays over the country.

"How beautiful!" exclaimed Devaki. "I don't remember ever seeing a daybreak so beautiful before. Here comes Mr. White. I was looking out on the sun, sir."

"You will soon, I hope, be gazing on the Sun of Righteousness, my child."

Devaki now grew heavy on Vincent's arm, and he gradually let her fall back on to her pillow again. Then he kissed her. She circled her arms about his neck and kissed him again and again, and for the first time since receiving the wound, cried—not from the pain of it, but with the parting from him whom she loved, him for whom she had received her death wound. "Good-bye," she whispered. "You, sahib, will never know how much Devaki loved you." Then, turning around to the others, she said, "Good-bye, grandfather! Good-bye, my sister! Good-bye, all! I'm going to leave you all now."

"May your soul be soon received into everlasting happiness," prayed Mr. White.

"Amen!" answered Jones and Shilstone. The others, however, had not sufficient mastery over their voices to respond.

Devaki's eyes became now fixed on Vincent. He took her hand in his, and she gazed lovingly into his eyes. Her own soon became glassy, and she breathed in short gasps. Her whole body then shook convulsively, and then all was over: her spirit had fled to its Creator. Not a sob broke the stillness that followed.

In accordance with Devaki's wish, her body was buried outside the fort, under a large shady tree.

CONCLUSION.

PERHAPS the reader has forgotten the promise made him in the very first chapter of this story. If he has, I must ask him to

again read the opening chapter, and he will soon come across the passage about Old "Jack" Company sending troops to Mariepoor to die; and about them continuing to send till—and I promised to tell him *what* in good time.

The reason—as, no doubt, the reader has already guessed for himself—is this: The object in keeping troops at Mariepoor, as already stated in chapter one, was to free the place of robbers—*i.e.*, of Yakoob and his men, for they were the only ones about there. This had now been accomplished, and "Jack" Company ordered the withdrawal of the troops.

A month after the destruction of Yakoob and his gang came the order to quit. There were none so delighted with the news as Hoyles and Vincent—especially the latter, for he had received advices from home that Dr. Snell was dangerously ill and would, in all probability, be unable to return to India for some considerable time. Hoyles sent in his papers, and Vincent was told that he was at liberty to return to England as the troops—drafts from different regiments—had orders to rejoin their respective corps, which already had doctors attached to them.

Some few days after Hoyles had sent in his resignation came the joyful news to Macbay that he was promoted to the rank of major in his regiment, which had lost its officer; and to Shilstone, that he was promoted to the rank of captain for his gallant conduct during the recent operations. His bravery was brought prominently into notice by the stirring article in the *Bombay Gup*, from the pen of Jones, who had now completely sobered down and was a prime favourite with the Mariepoor folk.

Things, then, were looking bright for our friends. Greengrass was the only one who had some cause to grumble. True enough his salary had been increased by a hundred rupees; but he had not got his orders to quit. In fact, he did not leave Mariepoor for nearly a year afterwards.

Helen did not forget the promise she made Devaki, and before leaving Mariepoor for good, she placed two wreaths on their father's grave.

Early one morning, the troops marched out of Mariepoor, with colours flying and band playing. I will not weary the reader by a description of the route; it will be sufficient if I say that all reached Bombay in safety. As luck would have it, a "trooper"

was ready to sail for England, and in her Major and Miss Hoyles and Vincent took passage.

On arriving in England, Vincent went immediately to his people, in Manchester, and Hoyles and his granddaughter settled in London. Helen and Vincent communicated with one another regularly, but as yet Vincent had not asked the girl to be his wife, nor did he till nearly a year after their arrival in England.

It was early in December, and Vincent had paid his usual fortnightly visit. He and Helen were sitting alone in the sitting-room, for the major had gone out.

"The last Indian mail brought me a letter from Shilstone," said Vincent.

"Oh! How is he? Married?"

"Yes. I'll read you what he says," and Vincent took a letter out of his pocket. "'I am glad to tell you, old chappie, I am married at last. Macbay stood best man for me. My wife sends her best *salaams* to you, and hopes to hear soon that you also are a happy man. I hear that Greengrass, to whom the major had intrusted the business, has sold Miss Hoyles' houses, left her by Devaki, at good prices.'"

After reading this extract from the Indian letter, Vincent folded and placed it in his pocket. Then he said, taking Helen's hand in his:

"Helen, may I write and say that I *am* a happy man? That you have consented to become my wife?"

And the answer was:

"Yes."

Hoyles was delighted when the news was broken to him, and so also were Vincent's people. They had taken a great fancy to Helen since the very first day they had seen her.

Within three months after this, Vincent and Helen were made man and wife. They went for a prolonged honeymoon trip to Switzerland, and on their return settled in Manchester, where already Vincent had extensive practice. The old major soon joined them there, and made his home with them; and he was never more happy than when telling his great-grandchildren—he had two of them in due course of time—about their heroic aunt, Devaki, and how she saved their father's life by giving hers for his.

THE END.

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Alfreda.

By MRS. LODGE,
Author of "GEORGE ELVASTON," etc.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WAS ever any man quite satisfied with the *dénouement* of a drama played on his own life's little stage? We are inclined to think not.

When the thrill of excitement caused by the last act dies away, and the curtain falls, then it is that a vague sense of expectations unfulfilled takes possession of the heart and fills the breast with pain and discontent.

Most of the ends at which poor humanity aim are marred by unforeseen events, and seldom reach ultimate perfection.

Some tourist fondly hopes that when he has reached a far distant height the broad landscape will lie open and clear before his enraptured vision; but when that height is gained he finds, to his sore disappointment, that mist and cloud obscures the prospect.

We pursue some object, it may be love or ambition, in the firm belief that when attained our happiness will be complete, and lo! we find it only brings us care and sore disquiet. The heart of man is never fully satisfied, perhaps never will be this side the grave.

Some turn for comfort to good works, and give with open-handed charity. Alas, they soon find that the recipients of their bounty know full well that it is much more blessed to give than to receive, and treat the donor accordingly.

Or it may be that we have set our hearts on loving and caring for some one, that we consider no sacrifice too great on our part to render them happy, until at length we find that all our efforts

are unavailing, and that our ideas and likings are as far asunder as the poles.

Something like this, in a vague sort of way, passed through the mind of Horace Merryman after his first interview with Alice.

For months he had sought after her and her child. He had planned a hundred things in his mind during this weary search to conduce to her happiness should he ever be fortunate enough to find her.

He had always pictured Alice to himself as a pale, drooping woman, needing support and comfort—a gentle, meek creature craving for sympathy and grateful for kindness.

A woman to whom a quiet fireside would prove a haven of rest, and a home she could call her own quite an ark of refuge.

He had looked out a pretty cottage in his rambles; he had even gone over it and lingered before it planning out a peaceful future beneath its humble roof.

That, he thought, would be just the sort of home for Alice and her child. They should live with him. How nice it would be for him to come home of an evening, after his day's work was done, and find some one to welcome him with a loving smile.

He heard long ago that Alice had brought shame to the family and broken her mother's heart. Still, she had erred through ignorance and blind confidence in the man she loved. It was not for him to cast a stone at her, but to bind up the broken spirit of his much-wronged relative.

She should be to him as a daughter. It would be happiness for him to spend his last days with one of his own kindred.

But the Alice of his dreams and the Alice of reality were entirely different beings. He might as well take a stormy petrel to his home and try to tame it in a cage as to think of winning Alice back to quiet domestic life.

It did not give him unqualified satisfaction, either, to find she was the widow of the late Lord Chineron.

He knew the history of that noble family well—indeed, he was well up in the peerage generally, so that he was well aware that a marriage had taken place between the Earl of Chineron and a grand-daughter of the Duchess of Morton some few years since, and that the supposed widow and her son were now in possession of the deceased nobleman's estate.

On the other hand Alice was poor and friendless, and even if

she should succeed in getting some one eminent in the law to put forward her claim, she would have a hard fight to regain her rightful position.

It was not in the nature of things that two noble houses should accept such a crushing disgrace without a struggle.

The Dowager Countess of Chineron must, by some means, have become aware of the existence of that pocket-book intrusted to his care; hence her stealthy visit to his employer's private rooms. How she had gained access to these rooms was still one of the mysteries that the old clerk found it impossible to solve.

Alice he knew would fight the matter out to the bitter end, although rank and wealth would be arrayed against her. There would be no compromise, he felt certain, between the revengeful and much-wronged Alice and the haughty Dowager Lady Chineron.

He began to feel, as Alex Cameron had done before him, that the burden laid on his shoulders was a heavy one, yet he did not shrink, as Alex had done, from putting his shoulder to the wheel.

He was still leaning with his head bent on his hands, buried in deep thought, when Alice swept into the office like a tornado, and, throwing herself on a chair, burst into a fit of hysterical weeping, with Freda, also weeping, clinging to her neck.

Utterly bewildered, Merryman sat staring at her like one stunned. He could not comprehend such wild bursts of long pent-up emotion.

However, he did what he considered best under the circumstances. Having heard Mrs. Limber call for *sal volatile* when labouring under extra excitement, he hurried away to the nearest chemist to obtain some.

When he returned with some ready mixed in a glass of water he found Alice more composed. She began to make excuses for her weakness, and told him that she had been quite overcome by seeing Freda almost carried off by a strange woman, and that she had only arrived in the nick of time to rescue her from her clutches.

The old man looked grave and shook his head. "Did you not leave her in the care of Mrs. Trimby?" he asked.

"Ah, in my excitement I had quite forgotten that," cried Alice with an uneasy look. "I cannot believe Mrs. Trimby would betray her trust."

"Ask Freda how it came about," said he, with the air of a man who likes to understand the case before he offers an opinion.

Freda related very distinctly all she knew about the matter, which was not much. A man and woman came into the room shortly after Alice left; and said to Mrs. Trimble that some one wanted her downstairs; that after exchanging a few words with them Mrs. Trimble left the room, bidding Freda not to stir until she returned; that she had not been gone long when a strange woman came and told her to put on her things, as she wanted to take her to her mamma; that she was very cross because she refused and said she must wait till Mrs. Trimble came back; and that the woman frightened her so, she went and got her hat and cloak, but she didn't want to go with her, so the woman took her by the hand and pulled her out of the room and downstairs.

"This is very strange," said Mr. Merryman reflectively. "How did Mrs. Trimble find you out, Alice?"

A shade crossed the brow of Alice; her eyes glistened. "I think I understand it now," she said with compressed lips.

Then she related the circumstance of Doctor Pounceford's visit, and his returning the next day with two other gentlemen on pretence of holding a consultation on Freda's case; and how that she had met Mrs. Trimble, as if by accident, close to her door that morning, when she found it impossible to shake her off, and at length consented to take her to her lodgings and leave Freda in her charge.

"It looks like a case of conspiracy to get Freda into their possession," he said with knitted brows. The sweet, gentle child had won the sympathy that her mother had failed to call forth from the old man's soul. She was high-born and an heiress; no rude hand should touch her, if his arm could defend her, even to the death.

It was not that she was of his kindred, strange as that may seem, that the old man swore fealty in his heart towards her. No, she was lovely and sweet as a spring flower, and no one should flitch her birthright from her, were they never so high and mighty. When he had put her firmly in possession of her heritage, he would retire at a distance and joy in her greatness far more than he would were that greatness his own.

"I do not like to suspect Mrs. Trimble; she proved such a

true friend in my distress," said Alice after a little reflection. "I don't think she would harm one hair of Freda's head."

"You will have to be wary, Alice," said Mr. Merryman slowly and reflectively. "A great lady came here once before, to inquire for Freda, and charged Mrs. Trimble that if she found her she was to let her know. I think the Trimbleys are honest, well-meaning people, and if Mrs. Trimble did tell that great lady where Freda was, she did it in the simplicity of her heart. Still, you will have to be wary, even of your best friends. Once Freda is in the power of certain great folks, your case is hopeless. What could you do, poor and friendless as you are? You might assert your right to be called 'my lady,' but you would find it a barren honour. You have no settlement, and if the lawyers could not see their way to be well fed, they would be slow to take up your case. But Freda is her father's heiress; we will soon get some one to pave the way to her inheritance."

"Alas, I know too well I am powerless!" said Alice, with a pitiful gesture of helplessness that went to the old man's heart at once. "My enemies have ever been too potent to work me evil, but you know the intricacies of the law and you will help us, will you not?"

Merryman assured her that he would see an eminent lawyer without delay, but his first care would be to see her and Freda to a place of safety.

Alice suggested that she should take Freda to Margate for a change; it was not likely that any one would track them there, she thought. She had some twenty pounds left that would serve for their wants for a month or two, at least.

Mr. Merryman, generally so dull of comprehension and slow to act, seemed wonderfully roused into action, now that others depended on his forethought and care. He decided that it was too late to start for the sea-coast that evening, that they would require a little rest after the excitement they had gone through, and therefore, Alice and Freda had better go home with him and remain for the night at his lodgings.

"Mrs. Limber is a very genteel person," said he, "and she happens to have a room vacant at present. A young German lady who sang at concerts left about a week since, and you can have the room she occupied, and board with the family."

This appeared a very suitable arrangement, at least for the

present, and Alice readily agreed to the proposal. Withal that her air was defiant and her appearance gaunt and far from prepossessing, Alice had much that was clinging and womanly about her still. The old man little thought how glad she was to find a relative, after so many years of loneliness, who was willing to befriend her.

"What name shall I give Mrs. Limber? she is so genteel in her manners that I am bound to introduce you," said the old man, quite in a deferential manner. He rather entertained a dread of rousing Alice's temper and seeing her eye flash.

"Chineron," replied Alice proudly; "from this day forth I will be known by no other."

They were just alighting from the train at Upper Holloway Station when Mr. Merryman asked the above question. Alice's answer took him rather aback; he looked at her gaunt figure and shabby attire; it was not in the fitness of things that he should introduce her as a lady of title.

Alice observed him scanning her dress dubiously. "I don't look much like a countess, do I?" she said with a laugh that was almost light-hearted and cheered the old man to hear. "I don't suppose your genteel landlady would believe you if you introduced me as one, and poor little Freda, in her threadbare frock and mantle, looks more like the child of a poor seamstress than the heiress to untold wealth; nevertheless our name is Chineron."

"But hadn't we better be cautious?" ventured the old clerk. "Your enemies are on the alert already, and they are powerful, if not all powerful."

"No matter," replied Alice firmly, if not a little defiantly. "We will take our lawful name in spite of them! But, my dear uncle, don't think me so silly as to wish to be dubbed 'my lady' in my present mean condition. Say I am your niece and that my name is Chineron; trust me, no one will call either Freda or myself 'my lady' whilst we walk about in threadbare garments and mended shoes."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

IT was late on the following morning when Horace Merryman arrived at Temple Bar by the Hornsey 'bus. On nearing the porter's lodge, on his way to Elm Court, he was surprised to find two or three policemen standing about.

To stop and, in common parlance, ask what was up? was but natural on the part of the old clerk.

“Case of some one missing since yesterday afternoon,” replied one of the policemen, who knew Merryman and therefore deigned to be communicative.

“Some one missing! Who is it? Not one of your boys, I hope, Trimble?” said the old clerk, addressing the latter part of the question to the gate porter.

Trimble uttered a groan that sounded very like the dull subterranean echo in the vaults of the Pantheon.

“’Tis his wife!” whispered the communicative policeman behind his hand. “Went out yesterday after dinner and haven’t returned since.”

Mr. Merryman’s eyes opened to their widest extent at this discovery. “Bless my soul!” he exclaimed. “Well, that’s odd.”

“She’ll never darken my doors again, unless we find her in a hospital!” said Trimble, raising his head and showing a face so savage and altered that Mr. Merryman scarcely recognized him. Poor Trimble, he certainly thought his wife had eloped with some gay young Lothario. He had lost all confidence in the partner of his life since he found that she had deceived him concerning the paternity of Freda, and like all slow natures, once he took a prejudice against any one it was no easy matter to regain his confidence.

“Why, man, you don’t want to find your wife with broken bones in some hospital ward, do you?” said Mr. Merryman, slow to perceive that the gate porter was jealous of his middle-aged, plain-looking wife.

“I’d rather find her dead than a disgrace to her children,” replied Trimble, with a terrible scowl.

“Oh, there’s no fear of your wife going wrong,” said Merryman in a matter-of-fact sort of way. “When she left home yesterday did she tell you that she was going to call on a friend in Dean Street?”

“No, she did not!” exclaimed Trimble, starting to his feet and seizing the old clerk by the arm. “Who was the friend, sir? I never heard of him.”

Mr. Merryman could not forbear a smile; the idea of staid, homely Mrs. Trimble keeping an assignation with a lover tickled even his dull humour. He hastened to explain—and all

the more readily when he found Trimby's grasp on his arm becoming a grip of iron—that it was a female friend Mrs. Trimby had called on, and that it would be advisable for one of the officers to go on to Dean Street and make inquiries immediately.

"Well, I'm glad we've got some clue to follow up," said one of the men, a police sergeant; "we'd be glad to have any information you could give us, sir, about the missing lady."

Mr. Merryman readily gave what information he was in possession of, which was of course but little; however, the police sergeant thought fit to act on it, and started off for Dean Street, to make inquiries, accompanied by one of the policemen.

"She went away with a man and a woman, you say?" questioned Trimby, who, like the Moor, still harped on his wife's supposed unfaithfulness. "Now, why, I ask, should she go away with that man?"

"There's more in this than you or I suspect," replied Merryman thoughtfully; "although why your wife should stay away from her home all night, without sending you word, is more than I can make out."

Trimby uttered another hollow groan and sank back in his seat; all his thoughts had taken complexion from his jealous fears. She had certainly eloped *with that man*, and left her husband and family without one word of regret or farewell. Mr. Merryman, having no sort of sympathy for the jealous husband, uttered a sound very like, "Bosh!" and proceeded on his way to his office. He had not gone far, however, when the sound of hurrying footsteps and short hysterical sobs made him pause and look back.

Mrs. Trimby, tearful and dishevelled, was hastening to throw herself into the arms of her doubting spouse.

With more curiosity than discretion, Mr. Merryman turned back to witness the result.

The good woman had fallen on her husband's neck in quite a melodramatic fashion, but Trimby was not to be softened by such female blandishments. His face was a study for an actor wanting to act Othello true to nature: dark, scowling, unrelenting and full of tragic purpose.

"Oh, Davy—Davy—haven't you a word of welcome home for your own wife?" Mrs. Trimby was sobbing, as Mr. Merry-

man came within hearing, and David, not trusting himself to speak, had pushed her from him and folded his arms to keep her at bay.

"I'm glad to see you home again," said the old clerk, like another Paul Pry, popping his head in at the lodge door. "What happened to you, Mrs. Trimble, that you stayed away all night and nearly frightened your good man here into fits?"

"Ay, that's the question, woman—where have you been since yesterday afternoon, eh?" asked Trimble, in a voice that would have made his fortune on the stage, it was so deep and hollow, and withal so full of fearful import.

"Where have I been? Oh, Davy, Davy, if you only knew, I think you'd murder the man as took me there!" cried Mrs. Trimble in high excitement.

"No, woman; I shall do no murder for the likes of you!" said the inexorable husband, in the same hollow voice and with that fearful scowl on his brow, his arms still folded on his breast. "No, you shall not incite me to murder! Go your ways—go back to that party as enticed you from your home an' family an' never darken my doors again!"

"Merciful heaven!" cried Mrs. Trimble, looking ready to faint. "What's come over you, Davy? Go back to that party—go back to a madhouse?"

David Trimble stared at his wife, opened his mouth to speak, but failed to utter a word; then he sank down on the nearest seat, nerveless, unstrung, trembling in every limb.

"Heigh-ho!" ejaculated the old clerk, opening his eyes to their utmost width. "You don't mean to say that, do you?"

"I do say as how I'm shamefully used!" replied Mrs. Trimble, her temper rising. "Here have I been treated as no respectable married female ever was before, an' when I come home expecting as how Trimble there would be overjoyed at seeing the wife of his bosom once more, he just about disowns me an' treats me crueller nor a Turk! Oh, Davy—Davy—how can you? Here Mrs. Trimble broke down and wept sorely.

"Better not give way, ma'am," said Mr. Merryman soothingly. "It's all a mistake. You see your good man thinks you are still young and handsome enough to captivate any gay young spark—and jealousy is cruel as the grave, you know, ma'am."

"Lor' a mercy, Davy! how could you be so foolish?" cried

his wife, smiling through her tears. "An' I daresay you are glad enough to see me back again, after all—ain't you, Davy, old man?"

But David only gazed at her open-mouthed, quite too wonder-stricken to reply or utter one word.

Mr. Merryman, who was all impatience to hear Mrs. Trimble's account of her night's incarceration in a madhouse, at length induced her and her husband to come with him to his employer's chambers, where, as he remarked, she could relate her strange adventures at her ease.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"WELL, as you know, I was left in care of Freda," went on Mrs. Trimble, after relating how she had met Alice quite by accident in Dean Street, "an' I was sitting with that dear child in my lap when a knock came to the door, an' before I'd time to say, 'Come in,' a man opened it an' entered the room, closely followed by a female of most respectable appearance.

"'Will you come down stairs, please, ma'am; some one wants to speak to you?' said the female, quite polite an' respectful.

"'Some one wants me! Are you sure? Did they say they wanted to speak with Mrs. Trimble?' I asked, thinking she had made a mistake an' come into the wrong room.

"'Oh, it's all right,' said the man, 'an' if you'll make haste, the person as wants to see you will feel obliged; she won't keep you a minute.'

"Well, as I didn't think any harm could happen by my going down to the door, I set Freda down in a chair an' followed the man down stairs, the female coming close after me.

"When I reached the front door there was a carriage standing before it, an' a person looked out an' asked, 'Is it all right?'

"'That's the person as wants to speak to you,' said the female, pushing me towards the carriage whilst the man opened the door.

"There were about a dozen people gathered about the house, attracted by the sight of a carriage an' pair, an' waiting to see what might turn up.

"'I think it's some mistake,' says I, when I observed that the person in the carriage was a perfect stranger to me. 'Oh, no, it's right, ma'am,' replied the stranger, an' before I knew what I was about, or could utter another word, I found myself hustled into

the carriage ; the female jumped in after me, an' we drove off at a rattling pace towards Oxford Street.

"When I recovered my breath, I demanded to know how they dared treat a respectable married female in this way, an' insisted on knowing where they were taking me.

"They might have been deaf for all the notice they took of me. 'Oh,' says I, 'you ain't a-going to kidnap a respectable female in this way. If you don't tell me this instant where you are taking me, I'll alarm the passers-by.'

"'You'd better not,' said the woman ; 'keep quiet or I'll make you.'

"'Hoity-toity !' exclaims I, my blood getting up at the way she spoke to me, 'I'll just show you what I'll do. How dare you keep me here against my will?' With that I gave a scream an' made a dash at the window. I just had time to call out murder once, at the pitch of my voice, when I found myself at the bottom of the carriage with a gag in my mouth an' my arms tied behind my back.

"That females were stronger in the arms than most men, I soon had occasion to know ; when they had drawn down the carriage blinds they lifted me up like an infant on the back seat, without even speaking to me.

"Well, I was nearly smothered with rage an' fright, let alone want of breath, so, as I couldn't speak nor move my arms, I began kicking with all my might.

"Bless you! before I knew how it came about, they had strapped my legs together in such a way I couldn't move them without feeling the most horrible pain.

"I don't know how I kept my senses after this. Here was I driven through the busiest streets of London, perhaps to a cruel death, without a soul knowing anything about it, an' I powerless to utter one cry for help ; if my own husband had been passing in the street he couldn't have helped me. An' what tortured me most was, I couldn't even appeal to these people for mercy, an' they never uttered one word during that fearful ride, which I shall never forget to my dying day, no, not if I live to be a hundred.

"Well, the carriage stopped at last ; we may have been driving for an hour, it seemed to me an age. The minute the carriage stopped the blinds were drawn up, an' I could see that we had pulled up before a large house of most respectable appearance.

I was more mystified than ever. It didn't look like a place they'd bring a stranger to for the purpose of robbery and murder.

"A man opened the carriage door. 'All right?' he asked, looking searchingly at me. 'Rather troublesome, eh? Well, no use making a noise here.'

"The woman took the gag from my mouth and unstrapped my legs; then got out and helped me to alight. Had my arms been free, I think I should have knocked her down for the treatment I had received at her hands.

"'Come along,' said she harshly, 'or you'll be made to,' when she saw that I didn't intend to go into the house.

"'Yes, better go in quietly,' said the man. 'The person that wants to see you is waiting for you inside.'

"Well, as there was four to one, counting the coachman, I thought I'd better go in and see the end of it.

"The door was wide open, so I followed the woman, who led the way, the man keeping close to my elbow.

"We went through a spacious hall, then through double doors into a passage, an' along that passage for some distance till we came to a door which the woman, who led the way, unlocked. This door led into a sort of ante-room or vestibule. We crossed this, then went through double doors again into a rather large room, very plainly furnished. The windows were open, and a beautiful green creeping plant trailed all over them, looking so cool an' fresh an' pleasant; but when I looked again I found, to my horror, that the windows were barred like a prison.

"The woman, who led the way all along, turned to me an' said rather pleasantly, 'You can sit down and make yourself comfortable till tea-time. Better take off your bonnet, and mantle too; you'll feel more at home.'

"'Now look here, ma'am,' says I, out of all patience with her cool airs, 'I'm tired of this game! The gentleman outside the door told me as how some one wanted to see me, so please don't keep me waiting, and I beg to inform you that I'm expected home to tea by my husband.'

"Would you believe me, the only answer she made was, 'Oh, all right,' an' set herself down as though I were a stock or a stone for all the notice she took of me.

The man left the room by a door opposite the one we had entered by, an' I was left alone with this aggravating person, who

never answered me one word, though I made myself hoarse with trying to make her understand that if she wanted anybody in particular she'd got hold of the wrong person. If my arms hadn't been tied behind my back she'd have felt the weight of my hand on that hard-featured phiz of hers afore we had been ten minutes in that room. As it was, all I could do was to use my tongue, but she took down a book from the shelf, an' began to read as coolly as if there wasn't another creature in the room. She didn't even look up at me, much less answer me.

"When I'd quite worn myself out with talking, the man came back.

"'Been troublesome?' he asked, addressing that aggravating person, but looking at me.

"'Rather,' answered she, with a yawn; 'says her name's Traddles, an' has a husband waiting tea for her at home.'

"'She'll announce herself as the Queen of England next, I shouldn't wonder,' said the man with a laugh. 'Will you come in to tea, Mrs. What-you-like-to-call-yourself?'

"'I never calls myself anything but my own lawful name, sir,' says I, drawing myself up and looking scornfully at him, 'and that's Trimbley; so please don't call me anything else, or there's them as may bring you up for libel.'

"'If you promise to behave yourself like a lady we'll untie your arms,' said the aggravating person. 'I don't wish the ladies to see you with your arms tied. They will think you are violent.'

"'Oh, better let her loose, she's not very wild. Come, make haste; tea's waiting,' said the man, beginning to untie my arms.

"Well, I went in to tea. There were about a dozen ladies seated at a long table, all nicely dressed, an' nothing very remarkable about them, except that they were all silent an' didn't take the least notice of me when I sat down.

"The bread an' butter an' cake didn't look much like company fare, an' the tea was weak enough, so this couldn't be a tea party. Who could the ladies be? an' where was I?

"'Can you tell me where I am, ma'am?' said I in a low tone to the lady beside me. To my astonishment she did not pay the slightest heed to my question, but went on sipping her tea, quite oblivious of everybody.

"I turned to the lady on the other side an' repeated my question. 'You mustn't talk at table ; it's against rules,' she replied without looking at me.

"An elderly lady opposite me, with very large staring eyes, said in a voice that seemed to come from the soles of her boots, 'Your highness is in Chin Tartary. We are expecting the Emperor of Russia to dine with us to-morrow.'

"The truth dawned on my mind all in an instant—I was in a mad-house!

"They had taken me by some mistake for a mad patient whom they had been sent to fetch from the house in Dean Street.

"Only for that thought I should have fainted right away. As it was, I felt terribly cut up, not knowing what lengths that aggravating person might go to, under the impression that she had an insane person to deal with.

"When tea was over I was taken back to the room I first entered, but although I did my best to make that aggravating person who had charge of me understand the mistake she had made in taking me for an insane patient, she never once took the least notice of what I said, but got out some needlework an' went on sewing as though she were stone deaf.

"It was getting almost dark when a young gent. entered the room. He never said one word, but, coming up close to me, viewed me over quite leisurely like, as though I were some fancy dog he was taking the points of.

"'Well,' says I, at last getting quite impatient, 'I hopes you see I ain't no more mad than yourself, an' if you are the doctor here I'll thank you to have me taken at once to my home, where my husband is——'

"But before I'd done speaking he turned an inquiring look on that aggravating female, who at once broke in on my discourse.

"'Yes,' said she, with a nod of her head towards me, 'says she has a husband an' sons, an' is called Grimaldi.'

"'Oh, you false female!' cried I, out of all patience. 'I'd like to teach you to speak the truth, for——'

"'Stop!' said the gent., laying his hand on my shoulder. 'We don't allow anything of that sort here. We keep a gag for unruly tongues.'

"'So I've found already, but you'll have to pay for that same or my name's not Trimbley!'

" 'Oh, Trimble, is it?' he asked quite mockingly. 'Well, try an' keep your tongue quiet and you'll get along quite comfortably with nurse here; she's kindness itself, is nurse.'

"Then he turned his back on me, said a few words to the nurse that I couldn't hear, and left the room whistling a music-hall tune just like the comic man at a play.

"Soon after that, the nurse lit a candle an' told me to come to bed.

"But I soon let her know that wild horses wouldn't draw me to bed at that hour, an' me without my supper, too.

"Well, the end of it was that they brought me in some bread an' cheese an' stout, an' after I'd had my supper, fearing that aggravating person would use violence towards me unless I obeyed her, sore against my will I followed her upstairs to bed.

"You may be certain I didn't sleep much, though I must say the bed was most comfortable: linen sheets an' everything about the room that a lady could wish. The nurse had a bed in the same room, an' all through the night, if I only stirred my finger or lifted my head from the pillow, she instantly up and stared at me with wide-open eyes that made me feel creepy.

"Just after daybreak I fell asleep an' only woke up by the noise some one made on entering the room.

" 'What, your patient not awake yet?' said this person. 'You'll let her sleep herself sane at this rate. What will Doctor Pounceford say to that?'

"Oh, says I to myself, I'll remember that name anyhow, but it won't be much profit Doctor Pounceford will get 'out of me, I'm thinking.

"I knew by this time that it was no use wasting words on the nurse, so I got up and dressed, ate my breakfast, then waited as patiently as I could to see what would turn up next.

"It was getting on towards ten o'clock when I observed the nurse putting everything in order as though she expected some one of importance.

"Well, I never heard any one enter that room, but all of a sudden, as I lifted my eyes from the carpet, I saw a pleasant-looking gentleman standing a few feet from me, an' the gent. I spoke with the night before close at his elbow.

" 'Where's our patient, nurse?' he asked, looking round the room.

"The nurse looked at him, then at me, her face beginning to turn quite yellow with fright.

"'What is this woman doing here?' said he. His face by this time was anything but pleasant to look at.

"'That woman, sir? that woman is the patient we brought from Dean Street—Mrs. Mathers, sir.'

"He made two or three steps towards her, his face quite distorted with rage.

"In my fright I began to scream; he looked as though about to murder her. 'Fool!' he exclaimed, shaking his fist at her, 'keep your tongue quiet.'

"Then turning to me in a rage, he cried: 'Stop that noise! Who are you? How dare you palm yourself off for some one else!'

"'I palm myself off for some one else!' says I. 'It ain't likely I'd want to leave my husband's home to come to Doctor Pounceford's mad-house.'

"'You've been very communicative, I find,' said he, looking at the nurse with a dark frown.

"The nurse protested with white lips that she had never once mentioned his name in my presence.

"'An' who are you, my good woman? Will you oblige me with your name?' said he, turning on me an' looking as though he'd like to annihilate me on the spot.

"'She calls herself Dimpley, I think,' replied the young gent., his eye twinkling as though longing to laugh outright at the doctor's discomfiture.

"'No, young man, I never called myself by that or any other name but my own lawful one, so you'd better take care or I'll bring you up for libel!' cried I, looking quite scornfully at the whole of them.

"'But what is your name?' asked the doctor. 'Why hadn't you told this person your name yesterday?'

"'Ask her if I didn't, more than twenty times. I begged her to let me go home last night, until I was hoarse with asking, but she treated me as though I was a dog barking at her. However, I've told that person, likewise that gent. there, already, that my name is Trimbley. My husband is to be found any day in the porter's lodge at the Temple. Any one will tell you that a honester man than David Trimbley never stepped in shoe leather;

so now that I've been an' told all of you who I am, don't go on pretending that you don't know my name, or I'll have the law on you, sure as I am a respectable married woman.'

"After that the doctor became quite civil, saying that he was sorry that his people made a mistake an' put me to so much inconvenience, an' that I was quite free to go as soon as ever I liked.

"But I soon gave him to understand that I wasn't to be dragged from my home an' gagged an' bound like a common felon for nothing.

"Then he took me into his study and wanted me to take a glass of wine an' some cake, but I shook my head at him, just to let him know I was up to his tricks; he'd like to have drugged me an' then have me dropped at some street corner, to be took up as drunk an' incapable.

"However, thank mercy, I got away from the house at last! The young gent., who is Doctor Pounceford's assistant, brought me home in a closed carriage an' let me out at Temple Bar. Nevertheless, as I told him an' Doctor Pounceford, I'd have the law on everybody concerned in dragging me to a mad-house an' detaining me there against my will all night."

"Poor Alice! she and her child had a narrow escape yesterday," said the old clerk. "Do you know that some one was in the act of carrying off Freda when Alice arrived at the house in Dean Street?"

Mrs. Trimble uttered an exclamation of astonishment, and David, who had listened in gloomy silence to his wife's long narrative, looked up with some faint show of interest.

"But where is Alice? Where is my darling Freda? Are they safe now?" cried Mrs. Trimble, starting up as though she meant to go in quest of them immediately.

At this moment the office door opened and Alice appeared leading Freda by the hand.

In another instant Freda was clasped in Mrs. Trimble's motherly arms.

"Won't dad kiss me too?" asked the child, looking timidly towards him.

Trimble stretched out his arms towards her and burst into tears.

It was a touching sight to see that fair, gentle child clasp her

arms around that uncouth man's neck and rest her head on his broad shoulder, like a dove finding rest. She had learnt to love honest David Trimble as her father, and had missed his thoughtful tenderness sorely since she had lived alone, in that dreary lodging, with her mother, whose life had been too soured and embittered to make her a lovable companion to the gentle, sensitive child.

Alice, who as yet was quite unaware of Mrs. Trimble's strange adventures in her stead, drew herself up with that Nemesis-like air of hers, and looked darkly at her old friends.

"I told you, David Trimble, that you should never see me or my child again until you would be proud to own our acquaintance. We can face the world without a blush now. We are no longer under a ban."

"Hush, Alice, not another word of reproach," interposed the old clerk quickly. "Mrs. Trimble is your true friend ; she saved you yesterday from a terrible fate."

Explanations quickly followed. Alice very soon found herself embracing her kind-hearted old friend and weeping on her shoulder, she scarcely knew why.

(To be concluded.)

Reminiscences of a Short Visit to Japan.

HOW WE GOT THERE AND HOME AGAIN.

PART IV.

OF the many steamers I have been on, none seemed to me more comfortable or better appointed than the Japan mail ship, by which we left Shanghai for the land of the "Rising Sun." The captain and officers were American or British, the crew entirely Japanese, part of the stewards the same, while a part with the stewardess were Chinese. The latter was a great eccentricity and her funny "pidjin" English often made me laugh; I wondered how, when the ship rolled, she could ever keep on her extraordinary feet of about three inches long! I was told that these "Amahs," as they are called, make the most excellent nurses to children, who become devoted to them. It would be a good thing if British stewards would take example in cleanliness from these Orientals; literally on these vessels not a speck of dirt or dust is to be seen anywhere, either above or below. The food, too, was very superior to the fare you usually meet with at sea. Among the first-class passengers were several Japanese men and women, both of whom were attired in their national dress. The former seemed quite at home at meals, but the latter looked terribly shy and frightened, as if they were very uncomfortable sitting on chairs, instead of on the floor, and as if they longed for their chop-sticks in the place of the forks and spoons. We longed to talk to them and set them at their ease, but as they knew no English it was impossible.

Nagasaki was the first port we touched at. It is a truly lovely spot: the bay is so shut in by the many green islands far and near, it has almost the appearance of a lake. The little town lies at the foot of some prettily wooded hills and looks very gay owing to the flags flying from each of the many consulates; when we arrived a portion of the British Fleet lay at anchor, with their colours also fluttering in the breeze. I had heard so much of the charms of Japan that I feared I should be disappointed, but, on the

contrary, from the first I was greatly impressed, which impression only deepened as I saw more of both the people and the country. Going on shore we made a pleasant expedition in "rickshaws" to Mogi, a pretty little sea-side place, where we had luncheon in a tea-house and were waited on by two nice little Jap maids.

The next day we steamed all through the beautiful inland sea, when I was much struck with the extreme softness and delicacy of colouring in the landscape everywhere. On landing at Kobe we were greeted with the sad intelligence of the attempt on the life of the Czarewitch* by a rickshaw boy at Otsu, his cousin, Prince George of Greece, who was with him, having saved him with the help of another rickshaw boy, but unfortunately not before he had been wounded. In consequence H. I. H. abandoned the remainder of his travels and the next day he arrived from Kioto, where he had been staying at the palace, and left for Russia. We watched his arrival at Kobe accompanied by the Mikado and by a large troop of cavalry, while infantry lined the streets, which were gaily decorated with flags and flowers; amidst the firing of guns he embarked on board of one of the ships belonging to the small Russian fleet, which lay off shore awaiting him, and the next morning the whole of this fleet sailed to return home. There were many reports afloat as to the cause of this assassination, one being merely that the man was one of the old-fashioned fanatics, with the rooted prejudice against the foreigner, and that others holding his opinions had urged him to this evil deed, because they were indignant at the large sums of money which were being spent on the reception of a strange prince. Other rumours were that the culprit was but the instrument of Nihilists, for there are a large number of Russians settled in Japan, and among them some who are supposed to belong to that body, who had seized this opportunity to carry out their wicked designs. Whatever it was, both the people generally and the government were horrified at such a crime being attempted, especially on one who was at the time their guest: the criminal was sentenced to penal servitude for life, while the governor, the chief constable and the high priest at Otsu were all dismissed from the Imperial service. Afterwards we heard that the Czar† had sent a present of fifty

* Now the Czar Nicholas II.

† The late Czar Alexander III.

yen (dollars) to be given annually for life to the rickshaw boy who had helped Prince George of Greece to seize and arrest the would-be murderer.

The scenery round Kobe is extremely pretty, and the harbour very fine. One day we went over by train to Osaka, where there is a splendid fort with fine battlements; an officer quartered there, who though he did not know English could speak a little French, very civilly showed us about. We were all much taken with the cleanliness of the place, such a contrast to China. The streets, the barracks and the tea-house, where we had luncheon, were all scrupulously clean and so were the people; they were so civil, too, and had such bright happy faces. The Japanese soldiers are very smart in appearance, their uniforms, which resemble European ones, are so well kept. Although small they are sturdy little men. It is not surprising that these well-drilled and well-equipped soldiers have so easily defeated the Chinese in the late war in Corea, considering that the latter in appearance are more like a horde of ragged beggars than anything else. On this occasion we had our first experience of a "Nippon Chow," or Japanese meal. Taking off our shoes at the entrance of the tea-house, we walked in our stockings on the clean matting to the dining-room, where, seated on the floor, we were waited on by little maids, who served to us, on small lacquer trays, basins in which our food was prepared. We fed ourselves with chop-sticks, which at first I found very difficult, but after a while I managed them tolerably well; anyway, our guide expressed himself surprised at our dexterity. We also drank "saki," the one wine of the country, which you drink from tiny open dishes, so that it would not suit a thirsty Englishman, for you get but a mouthful at a time. Having been told of a wonderful fan shop at Osaka, I determined to try and find it, so I left the rest of our party and our guide and trusted myself to discover it alone with the help of my rickshaw boy, who did not understand English. After some trouble I succeeded and by signs I contrived to make my bargains, carrying off a capital and varied collection, but suddenly I found there was barely time to catch my train. I managed to make my "boy" understand this; he simply flew like the wind through the streets and brought me to the station just in time. I hurriedly gave him double fare, for he deserved it, and then rushed to the carriage, where I saw my friends eagerly

making signs to me to join them. Just as we were moving, to my great astonishment my "boy" appeared at the window and thrust in the change from his fare, which I was unable to return, for the train was off. I could not help thinking you would not often meet with such honesty.

A short railway journey from Kobe brought us to Kioto, the ancient capital, which is enchanting, it is so entirely Japanese, and has no European quarter at all. On the way it was most interesting watching the peasants labouring in the rice fields, which are all flooded by irrigation, the seeds being sown in the water. They are so industrious that, combined with a fertile soil, sometimes three crops are grown in the year and always two. Our hotel stood high on the outskirts of the town in a lovely garden, with wooded slopes beyond, and from the balcony of my room I had a splendid panorama view for miles and miles of the country round.

The hotel proprietor and all his establishment were Japanese. Certainly no people know better than they do how to serve you well and make you comfortable. The cooking was excellent, and the cleanliness everywhere quite unique. I noticed here, as well as in all the Japanese hotels, houses, or tea-houses, the exquisite taste in the arrangement of the flower vases. I had often heard this was so, and realized fully when travelling in the land how true and how universal it was, for even in the most out of the way parts of the country you found the same ; in fact, this art is considered necessary in a girl's education, therefore they are all taught when quite young. The scenes in the streets were frequently very picturesque. Numbers of little children in their gay attire were to be seen playing in front of the neat houses, all so good-humoured, apparently never quarrelling, with such happy faces ; pretty girls in scarlet or sky-blue kimonos, as their sort of dressing-gowns are called, with bright-coloured obis (sashes), their hair elaborately done in the shape of a butterfly, with a flower daintily stuck in it, their faces enamelled, and their cheeks and lips rouged, fans or parasols in their hands, would be walking about, or, I should rather say, "waddling," which the pattens they wear cause ; these they remove on entering the house, and go about in their white cotton stockings, which always have a partition for the big toe. Sometimes they would be followed by one of the small native black and white pug dogs. The

married women wear quieter colours. Now and then they have a baby strapped on their backs. Usually their teeth are blacked, making the very ugly effect in their mouths of a row of boot-buttons, as formerly it was the custom for the teeth to be dyed on the marriage day. Now a law has been passed to stop this. In consequence, fortunately, the younger women have not this defect. The old women would occasionally appear in the national hood worn by all in winter.

The shops in this city were most attractive ; in many of them the owners had workrooms at the back, where we could see the men making gold lacquer in its manifold stages, red lacquer and the common lacquer, also cloisonné, or shippo, as it is termed in Japan ; bronzes, embroidery, wood-carving, ivory-carving, painting on china or silk, in fact every conceivable artistic work. Some of the pottery, too, was very fine both in form and quality, especially Seifu's, who is considered the leading potter of the day. I was fortunate enough to obtain two beautiful pieces direct from his studio. In England we do not see their finest work, as they will not send their best to the ordinary market, because they are too artistic to hurry it, although extremely industrious. The detail is so elaborate, each part must have equal time and skill devoted to it. Thus, even with some of their smaller products, a year or occasionally two or three years will pass before the object in hand is completed to the maker's satisfaction. I heard that the manufacture of gold lacquer is so costly that the emperor gives annually a sum to keep it up, for fear of the art being lost, owing to so few being able to purchase it, for it is little appreciated out of Japan, except by connoisseurs ; the quantity of gold in it, with the amount of careful and skilful labour it needs, being the reason of its costliness. Lacquer is made from the sap of the tseih-shoo, but the actual process of making it is still kept a dead secret among the Japanese. The resinous sap or juice of the tseih-shoo shrub is poisonous in its liquid state, and requires the greatest caution in using, for whatever it touches it stains. It is taken when the shrubs are seven or eight years old. Incisions are made into the bark and a shell is fixed to catch the sap, which flows into it during the night. I believe this continues to be done throughout the summer until the juice ceases to flow.

On entering a shop, if the shopkeepers think you mean to buy,

they bring you tea served in tiny cups without handles, after making you the usual reverence of the country, which is to bow the head very low, hitching up the shoulders while you do so and hissing all the time with your lips. If great respect is intended the hiss is made louder and the shoulders are hitched up higher. The shops are all very clean and covered with matting, which is kept in the most perfect order.

We made many charming expeditions from Kioto, among them to Otsu, where the murder of the poor Czarewitch* had been attempted, because we wished to visit some historical temples there; also Lake Beiwar, which is near and in the midst of some fine scenery. Another day we made a long excursion by rickshaws, each of us having three "boys," two to pull in the shafts, like in a tandem, and one to push at the back. Thus they kept up their speed to quite six miles an hour or more, returning by river, where we shot some rapids, the beautiful wooded banks on each side being ablaze with wild red and pink azaleas. I shall not, though, relate fully concerning all the temples we visited, or the expeditions that we made, which always took us through the most exquisite landscape, as this would only weary the reader, but shall rather reserve for this brief narrative simply the principal places and buildings we saw.

Unfortunately as the Mikado was residing for a while in Kioto, we could not see his palace, as it is closed while he is in residence. This we regretted, as we had a desire to see the artistic work of the interior.

Before leaving we had a very amusing entertainment one evening of another "Nippon Chow," or Japanese dinner at a tea-house, this time on a grander scale. I really began to feel almost at home with chop-sticks. As soon as dinner was over some pretty geisha girls came and danced before us, or I might more correctly say, postured before us most gracefully. They were most becomingly dressed, their little ways and manners being truly bewitching; one played the "samisen," another the "coto," while the rest were singing and posturing. The first of these instruments is something between a guitar and a mandoline, while the "coto" rather resembles a zither on a huge scale, but is placed on the ground and played with the fingers. They seemed much pleased at our praise of their performances. They

* The present Czar Nicholas II.

asked leave to examine the clothes and the jewellery of the other ladies and myself, and were much interested when we explained to them about our little ornaments. Two of them presented me with their visiting cards, which were most diminutive. Each card had a pretty little view painted on it, and the name printed in tiny Japanese letters in the corner.

With great regret we left Kioto, returning by rail to Kobe, and from there proceeding by sea to Yokohama, by another of the Japan mail ships, which was even superior to the first; in fact my cabin was so large in this one, I was able to have all my baggage in it, instead of sending down the bulk into the hold.

At Yokohama I had my first view of Fujiyama, which means "first mountain;" it is 13,000 feet in height. In the eyes of all Japanese it is a sacred mountain and superior in their minds to any other mountain in the world, and that is why they are so fond of introducing it into their paintings, in fact into almost everything they make on which a mountain can be formed. It was most striking as I saw it that day, when with a sky of the most delicate blue overhead, its snow-topped cone rose in the particular way it is apt to do, out of the soft grey clouds, that hid all its centre, which is the way it is so often represented in pictures, its white top sparkling in the brilliant Eastern sun, causing such a wonderful effect, that I felt I could well understand the good people of the "Land of the Rising Sun" thinking their special mountain quite "ichiban" or "a one," which is a favourite expression with them for the superlative.

We were most fortunate in securing one of the best of the guides, whose name was Jetzusa Yoshida. I had heard it said that he was supposed to be the most honest of all the guides; he certainly appeared in all money transactions to bear out this character. He was most obliging, taking endless trouble for us even beyond his natural duties and in the most amiable way; he was always good-humoured and smiling; I never once saw him put out. He lived at Yokohama, so while we were staying there, he brought his wife and his little son of three years old to see us. She was such a nice woman and so good-looking; having only been married within the last few years, she was fortunately not disfigured by the blackened teeth alluded to before, which gives such an unsightly appearance to the face and the effect as if the

mouth could not close. They seemed much attached to each other and were both very proud of their little boy, who was an extremely merry, intelligent little fellow. Yoshida's wife was accompanied by a very pretty niece, who was charmingly dressed in a most becoming national costume with a beautiful silk obi round the waist; the aunt initiated me into several of their ways of tying this sash.

I bought several costumes for children; for one I took the measure of a Jap child of fourteen; on my return home I found it just fitted an English child of eight, so diminutive are they in comparison to us.

Some of the shops at Yokohama were very tempting, especially those with stuffs, porcelain and sketches of the country on cardboard, which were painted in the most delicate and finished style. It is well situated, with a good harbour and views of distant mountains in the background, but it is too europeanized to please me as much as the towns already mentioned. Of course it has a race-course and a golf ground, for, as I have stated before, wherever John Bull settles he also establishes these two British sports. Quite a large British colony is living there; in consequence, combined with the numbers of Americans, besides a few Australians, the English-speaking races are by far the most numerous among the foreign residents throughout Japan; therefore at the railway stations all instructions are written up in English—but in that tongue only—as well as in Japanese, and now our language is being taught in all the public schools.

The country round is very pretty, with many interesting antiquities to be found. Among these there is a colossal bronze statue of Buddha, or "Daibutzu" as it is called, which means "Great Buddha;" this famous image stands in the gardens of an ancient temple near to Hasemura, which is less than half a "ri" from Kamakura. "Daibutzu" was cast in 1252 by Goroyemon, under the orders of Yoritomo; it was formerly under the roof of the Temple of Shojo Senji, but the latter no longer exists, having been destroyed, it is said, by a tidal wave in 1494. Nothing now remains but the foundation stones.

Japan is celebrated for two such colossal images. The largest is at Nara, near Kioto. It is said that a full-grown man may

crawl through his nostrils into the head. Its dimensions and those of the one at Kamakura are given below.

Nara.		Kamakura.	
Height ...	53 feet 6 in.	Height ...	50 feet 0 in.
Length of face ...	16 " 0 "	Length of face ...	12 " 0 "
" of ear ...	8 " 6 "	" of ear ...	6 " 6 "
Width of nostrils	3 " 0 "	Width of nostrils	2 " 3 "
" of mouth	3 " 8 "	" of mouth	3 " 3 "

According to the Japanese the two figures are composed of copper, tin and a little gold. They are hollow, and the one at Kamakura is decorated inside after the manner of a temple ; it weighs about 450 tons.

Our next move was to Myanoshita, a most charming spot in the mountains, 1,100 feet above the sea, close to some hot-springs, which supplied the comfortable "Fujiya Hôtel" with the most enjoyable baths I have ever been in. The water, which was naturally warm, flowed straight from the springs through the baths, so that the whole time you were in them, fresh water was coming over you and passing out at the other end. The hotel was entirely built of wood, partly arranged according to Japanese custom ; it was thoroughly clean throughout, as were the charming little maids too, who waited on us in their native dress. They were always smiling and full of fun, so eager to do all they could to please, talking a peculiar sort of "pidjin" English ; the one who attended to me said : "Me bring rady one piecey more bigger hot water" (I will bring lady one more jug of hot water). They cannot pronounce the letter L ; even Yoshida, who spoke fairly well, failed ever to pronounce an L.

Of all the expeditions we made, I thought the scenery of those from Myanoshita excelled all others, especially to Lake Hakone, from which we had the most complete view of Fujiyama we ever had, from its base to its snow-crowned summit glistening in the sun, the shores of the lake being covered with pink azaleas, forming a striking contrast to the dark green of the stately pines, in the ancient Temple gardens, which extended for some way along the water-side. On our road there, we passed through endless woods clothed in the tender verdure of spring, with here and there clusters of wisteria or plants of red azaleas. Each time we emerged into the open, ranges of prettily-shaped hills met our gaze, while birds sang too engagingly above us ; one had, I

think, the sweetest note I have ever heard. I felt sorry that I failed to find out its name, for its note was not familiar to me. We also passed some sulphur springs, at which there was an establishment of native baths, where both sexes bathe together. Every few miles, in all our excursions all over the country, we came upon charming tea-houses, from which the landlady or her daughter would at once run out to offer tea from the tiny cup. I quite grew to like this beverage and often found it refreshing after a long walk; it tasted more like the green tea we drink in England; it is of course drunk by itself without sugar or milk.

I was much taken with the native craft in all the villages, such pretty wood carvings, from neat, well-finished cabinets to the smallest boxes or toys, usually with some handy dodge about them quite unique and unlike anything in any other country.

On our way to Tokio we had to return and take the train at Yokohama, so I seized the opportunity of telegraphing from there about noon on June 6th my congratulations to a friend who was to be married in London on June 3rd. So well had I calculated that the telegram was received on the latter date about 4 p.m., just after the wedding had taken place; it seemed curious that, wiring on the 6th, it should arrive the 3rd.

If possible, Tokio interested me the most of all these wonderful places. It is vast, in fact, the streets seem never to end, and the innumerable low houses in neat rows continue as far as the eye can carry. Our hotel was in the suburbs, and from my window I had a splendid view, with the river in the foreground, full of the pretty lotus flower in full bloom. We drove all round the capital to get every view of it and from all parts. I felt equally impressed as we drove past the Mikado's palace. I longed to see the interior, which I had heard was very beautifully decorated with all the best artistic work of the country. We had contemplated arranging to be presented at court, as this would have given us an opportunity of seeing the palace, but owing to being pressed for time we were unable to do so. However, the glorious Temples of Shiba, which are close to Tokio, are decorated with as fine artistic work as can be seen; one feared even in one's stockings lest one should scratch the exquisite lacquer floors. They stand in a grove of magnificent cedars, with stately avenues of these grand trees leading up to them, besides the usual rows of stone pedestals and their lantern tops, which every temple has, the

thick branches of the cedars producing a dim religious light within and around the buildings, as if to mark the hallowed spot in contrast to the dazzling brightness one experienced on emerging from the grove on a hot summer's day.

At the British Legation I made the acquaintance of some Japanese, all of whom I found charming, the Emperor's chamberlain being a particularly agreeable man. He conversed a good deal on the distress of all his country at the recent attempt on the life of the Czarewitch. He it was who gave me the information before referred to, that the Mikado gave a large sum annually for the keeping up of the gold lacquer work in Japan. I also learnt from him that the people are so naturally artistic that in the prisons two-thirds of the inmates are employed in artistic work and only one-third in manual labour, as the former work brings in so much more money to the state owing to its greater value. He, like all those attached to the court, was in European dress, the imperial command having been given some time ago for it to be adopted at court by both sexes. The Empress brought her influence to bear much in regard to this, and with reason too; for although one regrets the doffing of the picturesque "*Kimono*," which to the women especially is so far more becoming, I was told that it was really not warm enough for winter, and, in consequence, the women constantly get consumption or some illness from not being sufficiently clothed. In addition to this, as long as they stick to their national dress they are treated in the usual Oriental fashion, almost like slaves, and have to wait on their husbands, whereas, once a lady dresses in petticoats, she precedes her husband on entering the room and he waits on her in accordance with our more chivalric ideas.

I visited a school under the patronage of the Empress, and which, I believe, she originated for the education of the daughters of the *Daímios* (nobles) and of all the upper classes, as she is very anxious for the better education of the women, which has hitherto been much neglected. She makes a personal visit to the school annually and gives away the prizes. It comprises 320 pupils; half of them wore the national costume and half of them European; certainly the former looked most at their ease. The teachers, who were all Japanese women, except one English woman, also wore European clothes, including the head, who was a man. German, French and English are taught, but only a few learn the first two

languages, while each girl learns English. I asked one who was being taught French which she preferred ; she eagerly replied English. We found one girl learning the piano, but they do not make much way with music generally, except with their own, which it is the custom for the blind to teach, and a blind man was instructing a girl in the art of playing the coto, a string instrument which stands on the floor and has rather a mournful but soft, pretty tone.

The blind are also employed as shampooers (rubbers) owing to their touch being so light. To let people know they are near and can be had, if required, they play a pretty sort of whistle, almost like a flute, outside the houses, which makes a sort of plaintive half-weird and half-melodious sound, and is rather attractive. By slow degrees the Japs are taking up music a little, for at Yokohama there was a very creditable brass band, in which the performers were all natives.

The class which interested me most at the girls' school was the painting ; the pupils were all sitting on benches, painting on desks in front of them, and not, according to the habit of their country, on the ground. They were all wonderfully talented, and the rapidity with which one child of fourteen painted a cluster of flowers from nature, without drawing them first, astonished me. The copies some of the older girls had made of English drawings, especially of some of Herring's Highland cattle, were most remarkable ; for one must bear in mind, both the landscape and animals are quite unfamiliar to their eyes, being totally different from anything in Japan. Art, though, is so innate in them, they have the power, after very little study, to follow and appreciate it in a perfectly different line to their own.

Mr. de Bunsen, the chief secretary of the British Legation (now minister at Siam), who had just arrived from Washington, was most kind in entertaining us and in escorting us to see all he thought might interest us. He introduced us to the principal of the School of Art at Tokio, who was most courteous and took infinite pains to show us over, informing me that he considered, although his countrymen had benefited artistically, especially in figure painting and perspective, by their intercourse with European artists, he must say, on their behalf, that he felt the latter had also benefited by their intercourse with Japanese artists in the depicting of nature and scenery. He explained to me that the

reason the Japs generally paint sitting on their heels, with their object lying flat on the ground before them, is, that they so often paint on silk, and in this position the colour does not run. We saw here artists of all kinds, some making gold lacquer, some carving both wood and ivory, and some making cloisonné. A special new sort of this choice ware was being exhibited, in which you could not discover the gold outline in the tracery of the design, the enamel being so completely laid over it as to hide it. But for my own taste I preferred the ancient style, in which the perfect lines of the design can be traced throughout, for in really good cloisonné there is great beauty in the form of the outline. We were also shown the porcelain of all dates, some of the modern being quite exquisite as well as the ancient; among the latter were the finest specimens of "satsuma" in existence. The principal told me that the South Kensington Museum, in London, possessed some of the best Japanese art work, especially the best lacquer. On bidding us good-bye he kindly invited us to a tea ceremony, which, with great regret, we had to decline, as we were leaving.

Being anxious to see all I could of the artistic talent of the land, I inspected some of the private studios, where I was much interested in watching the artists at work and much struck with their great diligence. From one I purchased some really beautifully painted "Kakemonos," procuring them thus direct from the studio. I obtained some really superior articles, very different to those picked up in the shops.

The iris garden near Tokio was in full bloom and was one of the prettiest of sights; the flowers were growing in irregular heights in masses and were of all shades of blue mingled with white. The wisteria, too, which covered one of the tea-houses in the neighbourhood, was truly a spectacle; the quantities of mauve blossom were so thick that not a leaf nor a twig of the shrub could be seen. Undoubtedly one of the great attractions of the plants in Japan is the wealth and the richness of the blossom, which seems to grow there in greater magnitude than anywhere else that I have seen.

The line of railway between Tokio and Nikko was very striking; for twenty-five miles it passed through the famous avenue of creptomeras, which magnificent trees are about 200 feet in height and stretch over a length of nearly forty

miles, ending up steep inclines in the approach to the celebrated Temples of Nikko, which are by far the finest of all the many beautiful temples in Japan, standing as they do in most extensive and well-kept grounds. There are fifteen, besides a five-storied pagoda, all of them being dedicated to Buddha. The wondrous beauty of the carving, the designs, the colouring, and the form both within and without are far beyond my powers of description. Each time I entered them and crept softly about in my stockings on the delicate gold-lacquer floors, I seemed to find some fresh gem or work of art to admire; I could sit for hours gazing up at the glorious enamel work in the ceilings alone, where each minutest detail was perfect. The old priests in charge looked very picturesque in their dress of yellow drapery, their heads and faces shaved and their bare feet in sandals. They were very friendly and civil to us, especially so on seeing how truly we appreciated and admired these marvellous temples. Pilgrims were constantly coming to and fro from all parts of the empire to worship there. We unluckily just missed the great festival of the year, at which the procession must be a wonderful sight, if the panorama picture of it given us by our hotelkeeper is correct.

The red lacquer bridge across the river is a great feature at Nikko. The legend attached to it is, that a Shogun (ancient noble) who was pursuing his enemy was stopped by the floods, making the river impassable; he therefore prayed to Buddha to help him, and then determined to rest the night by the water-side. At daybreak he awoke to find this beautiful red lacquer bridge constructed, by which he was enabled to pass over.

We made many enjoyable picnics in the neighbourhood, which is all richly wooded, chiefly with maple trees; I heard that in the autumn their tints are quite lovely. The hills all round, many of which were 9,000 feet in height, were entirely wooded.

I must confess the day we left Nikko I felt a great lump in my throat as I was being conveyed swiftly to the station in a rickshaw. On alighting I said "Sayonara" (good-bye) to the "boy" who had drawn me; he quickly made me the deepest bow, hitching his shoulders very high and hissing loudly with his mouth, to show the greatest respect, and then said: "Sayonara, rady, and please come again." I felt much touched at his bringing out so appropriately the few words of English he

knew, but like all his nation he could not pronounce an L, but used an R in its place. We had but a few days at Yokohama after this, which were spent in collecting together our many purchases and getting them packed, before sailing in one of the fine Pacific mail ships for San Francisco.

Our guide and several other Japanese friends came to see us off, and very sad were the partings. I strained my eyes, glasses in hand, till the very last vestige of land could be seen. I felt really grieved that our pleasant stay in Japan was at an end; the recollection of it with all its charms must ever live in my memory.

The Pacific is certainly an unpleasant sea. Although I am a good sailor and kept perfectly well, I found this voyage both trying and monotonous; we never passed another ship the whole time, nor did we see a bird or any living thing. As we took a northerly course, it was very cold, which I felt all the more after the hot climates I had been in; fortunately we had several old friends among our fellow-passengers, who helped this fortnight to pass more quickly than it otherwise would. We had hoped to arrange to go by a steamer touching at Honolulu, and thus get a peep at the Sandwich Islands, but finding this would delay us a good deal, we abandoned the project.

After a voyage of thirteen days we landed at San Francisco, but had only time to sleep there one night, which we regretted, for we should have preferred to have extended our tour in California, much wishing to see more of that beautiful country, but being obliged to arrive in London by a certain date, our journey through America had to be very rapid.

The scenery from the railway between San Francisco and Portland was very fine, the whole train at one place being conveyed across the river in a pontoon. I could hardly believe that Portland had only existed for the last forty years, it seemed so large and so prosperous; it is well situated, standing high, surrounded by mountains, the principal streets being laid out in boulevards. The women of the better classes were all most becomingly attired in Paris toilettes and were extremely good-looking.

On leaving this city we steamed through large forests with views of the Cascade Mountains in the distance, the train again crossing a river on a pontoon. At Tacoma we took a coasting

steamer as far as Whatcome. The scenery here recalled to me more the inland sea of Japan than anything else, only it was finer owing to a background of two magnificent ranges of snow mountains. Whatcome is quite a new settlement, but is already very prosperous. We were glad to rest at one of its hotels, which we found clean though primitive, before proceeding by train to the Junction, which connects with the main line of the Canadian and Pacific Railway. We had much wished to go to Vancouver, but from lack of time it was impossible; however, I was assured that the scenery we had passed through was much the same as it is there and around Victoria.

Our first stoppage after this was at Glacier House, where we found an excellent dinner awaiting us, each table in the restaurant being beautifully decorated with wild flowers, in quite a different way to the Japanese, yet quite as picturesque and effective. A glorious golden and rosy sunset was reflected all over the finest glacier in the world, which rises up just behind the station. It was followed by a brilliant moon, which lit up the magnificent landscape through which we now travelled in the heart of the Rocky Mountains, passing by rushing torrents of a milky blue, caused by the melted snow; by rapids, cascades and lakes, with ranges of glaciers and snow-covered mountains, until we reached Banff. At this beautiful spot we rested for a few days in a most luxurious hotel. I felt I did not wonder at the Canadians being proud of this railway, for it is undoubtedly one of the greatest engineering feats of the age.

When we left Banff the train was four hours late. I therefore said to the darkie guard, I supposed we should make up for lost time. He replied, "Yes, make it up in two days; we shall arrive at Toronto at the right time." This sounded strange to my British ears, accustomed to our short journeys, to hear of a train making up time in two days instead of in two hours. These darkie guards sometimes amused me very much. I always found them civil and obliging, though somewhat cool in their ways. As usual, the mosquitoes, which always found me out everywhere, tormented me in the train and prevented me from sleeping at night. So one evening I put on some eucalyptus oil to keep them off; the guard asked me what it was. I explained. He answered, "Better mosquitoes than that bad smell!"

The prairie land seemed excessively tame after the Rockies.

The Red Indians we saw at the stations, with painted faces and clothed in skins and feathers, alone broke the monotony. We found a fairly good hotel at Winnipeg, and were very glad to get a night's rest there before proceeding to Fort Arthur, where we embarked on board of one of the steamers on Lake Superior. This voyage of two days and two nights was very unpleasant, especially as on this vast lake, where you completely lost sight of land, it was extremely cold and rough. Nearly all my poor fellow-passengers, particularly the women, succumbed and had to disappear. I was thankful myself, though more fortunate than they were, when we reached the calmer waters of Lake Huron, with its pretty shores. It was rather curious at Sault Ste. Marie, where the three lakes meet, Superior, Michigan and Huron, to see our great steamer sink in the lock, until on a level with the latter lake and with the lower part of the rapids which fall there, and afterwards see her glide away across the lower water. In a few hours we landed, and after a short journey in the train we reached Toronto.

The next morning we drove all round this town, which possesses some good buildings and a university; in the afternoon we crossed beautiful Lake Ontario by steamer, and in about three hours time we arrived at Niagara. My first sight of these splendid falls was by moonlight; never can I forget the impression they made on me, glittering under the silvery rays of the moon. Early and eagerly the next morning I returned to view them by daylight, when the glorious colour of the water, a sort of eau-de-nil blue, struck me much, besides the marvellous width of the falls, the spray dashing up twice the height of both sets of them, owing to their tremendous force. The rapids of Lake Erie are like a great tumultuous ocean in an angry storm. I could sit for hours watching them alone, in fact, I think I could never tire of gazing at any part of these wondrous waters. What too is most remarkable is, that immediately after this grand torrent the water becomes quite calm and flows away in a graceful river into Lake Ontario.

We spent several days at Niagara, and thoroughly enjoyed the rest at such a refreshing place after all our fatigues. A night's journey in a most luxurious train brought us to New York, where, after a short rest and breakfast, I hastened to see all I could of that great city before embarking in the

evening by one of the White Star Line, "homeward bound." This, I must confess, had a genial sound, much as I had enjoyed our ten months of travel all round and nearly all over the world.

It was a glorious moonlight night, and I sat up very late watching the shipping in the fine harbour. Notwithstanding, I rose at break of dawn the following day to get the last view before sailing out of the Bay of New York, the great beauty of which I had always heard of, but it even surpassed my expectation. As the summer haze of the early morning lifted, fresh objects appeared in sight, from the main land, the islands, the shipping of all kinds, to the great statue of Liberty rising straight out of the sea, the whole effect being indeed magnificent.

We had a most enjoyable voyage, lying on deck in cottons, until we steamed into British waters, when it became excessively rough, cold and showery: chairs were blown over, the decks were dripping, and we had all the usual discomforts of "dirty weather;" many unfortunate passengers disappeared until we reached land. It was so hazy, too, that the fog-horn, which has a maddening sound, was going night and day. At last we lay off Queenstown, stopping for ten minutes to give off and pick up mails, and as the tender approached for the latter, the hearty British cheer which met my ears made me realize the joyful moment had come and that we were once more home again.

L. A. L.

THE END.

"Just Waiting."

"THERE'S a long sweep of hills at the back of the house and the room I mean Hilda to have looks right across to them, and if it weren't for the different trees and the heat, she might fancy that she had never left old England."

I put down the letter I was reading for the tenth time. It was from my son in Africa, and contained, as most of his letters now did, little else than his plans or hopes for the comfort of Hilda Cheltnam, the girl he was going to marry as soon as he could afford to come over to fetch her and keep her properly out there. He had been away some time, many would have thought too long to trust to the constancy of a girl as pretty and as much given to flirting as Hilda ; but then I could not imagine for one moment that any one whom my boy loved could seriously entertain thoughts of another man, that is if they had the use of their eyes. He and Hilda had grown up together, and I shall always believe that it was on her account that he went abroad to get money more quickly, for I quite remember the look on his face when she said one day before they were engaged :

"Of all silly things, long engagements are the worst, and nothing makes a girl so old and wizened as waiting."

She had already waited two years, but the quiet village in which we lived had not seen much of her during that time, for she was constantly away in London, staying with a married sister, and now George would be home in a few months, so it would be all right, and even if I were left alone in my old age, the certainty of his happiness with her would be peace for me, and that is all old people ought to expect when they have out-lived the one who was most dear.

My boy's letter fluttered unheeded to the path at my feet, for I was thinking of the time, twenty years ago, when he and I stood together by a newly-made grave in the little churchyard. Since then he had been my all, and now I must stand aside and see another taking my place. Well, well ! so long as he was happy ! The house and garden had not changed since he left. I had been careful to keep them just as he had last seen them, and

now he would soon be here. Perhaps the roses grew more thickly over the front of the house, and one of the old cherry trees that he used to climb when he was a boy had blown down. But that was all. We had even tried to keep the paths as he had ; and all the —

"Ah! Mrs. Gordon," said a voice at my elbow, interrupting my reverie, "taking advantage of this lovely spring day, I see. Well, you couldn't be in a nicer place than your own garden," and Mr. Cheltnam took his seat at my side on the bench that stands under the pear tree on the moss-grown lawn.

"And so George speaks of coming home soon," he continued. "Well, I am glad of it, though that means that I shall lose Hilda. I've no great opinion of long engagements myself."

"It was unavoidable in this case," I answered rather stiffly ; "besides, George is worth waiting for."

"Oh, of course, of course, George is a fine fellow. But one never knows how things may turn out."

I did not understand what he meant, so made no answer, and he began to tell me about a visit that Hilda was going to pay to London.

"But she'll be back long before George gets home," he added hastily.

"Of course," I answered, not attaching much importance to the fact of her going, as she was always away.

"She may as well have all the gaiety she can, you see. I expect things will be pretty quiet out there."

I thought they would, but I also thought that she would have George, and that would make up for it.

"Mrs. Cheltnam wants you to come round to see her this afternoon," said my neighbour, rising. "May I say that you will?"

We were old friends, the Cheltnams and I, and few days passed without a visit between the houses ; that was how George had seen so much of Hilda and fallen in love with her pretty face as he watched it growing prettier each year. Even to me she was wonderfully charming, with her large blue eyes and golden hair and the dainty features and colouring of a Watteau shepherdess ; I could almost understand my boy's infatuation, for her manners, when she chose, were just as dainty as her looks.

The months before his return went, to me, on leaden feet, but at last the day on which he would reach home arrived. For the hundredth time I went over the house to see that all was in order, and then I sat down in my quiet drawing-room, waiting. The large old clock ticked the minutes away, the doves cooed as they fluttered into the cot, and those were the only sounds that disturbed the stillness of the glowing summer day. Then all at once the gate swung quickly back on its hinges, somebody ran up the path, and before I could get to the door to open it, my heart beat so, the window of the room in which I sat was pushed open and my boy was in my arms.

"You've not altered a bit, mother; you look as young as ever, and I believe you have got on the very same black silk frock you used to wear before I went away."

It was the very same, my best, and I had put it on to do honour to him. I wished I could have said that he had not changed, but he had grown very thin, and there was a careworn look about his eyes that was new to me.

"I've not made my fortune yet," he said with his jolly laugh, "but I've not done badly. But what rot it is for people to think that money rains from the skies in the colonies. It is to be got, but, by Jove! you have to work for it, and I've worked as I never worked here, and turned my hand to everything, what's more. You wouldn't have known me sometimes, mother; but the worst's over, and when I go back it'll be pretty plain sailing, only I mustn't stay here long or things will all get out of gear."

I tried to hide my own disappointment as I asked with a smile:

"But what will Hilda say to that? Girls like a long time to buy their trousseau."

"Hilda's a brick and says she'll be ready."

And that told me that his first visit had been to her. We sat together on the faded old chintz-covered sofa as the afternoon waned, and he told me of what he had done out there, and though he made light of it, I could see that he had had a hard time, almost privation, though good fortune followed, and I felt proud of him. But right at the bottom of my heart there lurked a little sad feeling that my boy had lost his bright morning face, I felt for ever.

We were very festive in the village in honour of his return, and

my black brocade and old lace saw more service than they had done for a long time. George enjoyed it all, I could see, and his gay laugh and stalwart figure were quite a feature in all the gatherings. I could not help recalling what Mr. Addison wrote in one of his papers to the *Spectator* about travel being such education for an intelligent man, and I applied the saying to George, for I noticed that he held his own with all the elder gentlemen of the village, and that they listened to his views with respect.

"My dear Mrs. Gordon, I congratulate you! George has grown such a capital fellow! You must be proud of him," said Mr. Jeffreys, our old vicar, coming to me after the dinner they had given at the Vicarage for us, "only it makes one doubly sorry to lose him again, and then he takes my prettiest parishioner away with him," he added with a laugh.

I looked at Hilda; she was seated in the window talking to George, so lovely in her white dress, that my companion's description did her bare justice. She was not only by far the prettiest girl in our village, that was scant praise, but she would have been remarkable for her beauty in a much wider field. As I thought this, for the first time the question rose in my mind as to how she would suit the rough life she was going to. For hard I knew it to be, though my boy had toiled day and night to make it easy for her. She loved luxury, I knew that; she loved dainty clothes and living; but surely she must love George more than these? He was talking to her eagerly, and from the questioning way he kept looking in her face, I fancied he was telling her something that he hoped would please her, and she sat listening not very attentively, for I noticed that her hands kept arranging and re-arranging a trimming at the front of her dress, but occasionally she raised her eyes to his and smiled, and that seemed to satisfy him.

"He doesn't look quite the weight he used to be," said the vicar, who had been a boating man in his young days, and still occasionally lapsed into the phraseology of that time.

"He has worked so hard, you see."

"To be sure! To be sure! Well, it's for something well worth winning."

Hilda was coming towards us.

"Mrs. Gordon," she said in her clear, rather affected, voice,

"George has been telling me all about his house. I think he has been very clever to get one together so soon, don't you?"

"I am glad you think that, my dear," I answered, "and I hope you will be pleased with the house when you see it, and that it will be a happy home for you."

She smiled rather absently in answer.

"And the garden would please *you*, mother," said George eagerly. "I tried to copy the old one here, only everything is so hideously new and fresh that I don't believe it looks a bit the same. But there's a seat like yours under the pear tree, waiting ready for you when you come out to see us."

It was my turn to smile absently, for I felt that visit would never come off, but I wouldn't damp his pleasure by saying so.

"Ah, George, you make us old people long to be young," said Mr. Jeffreys, laying his hand on my boy's shoulder.

"Why, sir, it's nothing to go over there, and the boats are A 1. You couldn't be more comfortable; why, it's positive luxury."

I could see he was trying to make the best of it before Hilda, so I chimed in:

"They are floating palaces, I am told; George, your old home must look very shabby after all this."

"My old home is my dear old home," he answered simply, and the tears came into my eyes as I heard him.

"I think the steamers must be lovely," said Hilda, with more interest than she had yet shown, "and then I believe that you meet such nice people on them."

Poor George looked so pleased that I felt quite sad; it did not seem to strike him that her speech was hardly a compliment to himself.

"I am expecting Arthur down next week," said Mr. Jeffreys. "He tells me that he is bringing a friend with him, an Australian millionaire. Rather in your line, George; you will be able to compare notes."

"Not much of the millionaire about me," replied George ruefully.

"Never mind, my boy, never mind. We all have to make a beginning," said the vicar hastily. "Miss Hilda, give us a song to cover my unlucky remark."

As I listened to Hilda singing, the question of her fitness for her future again occurred to me, but this time I angrily closed

my ears to the tormenting doubt ; it was wanting in loyalty to my son's choice.

What glorious summer days those were that welcomed George back to his own country ! I recollect their cloudless brightness so well, and he revelled in them with a delight that does my heart good to look back on. He was constantly at the Cheltnams', of course, but he always found opportunity to keep me from feeling left out in the cold. The memory of that first part of his stay and the memory of his boyhood are linked together in my mind with the golden chain of his remembered happiness.

Our circle received quite an addition in the course of the next week. The vicar's son Arthur came down, bringing with him the friend Mr. Jeffreys had told us of. I met the two young men as I was going down the lane into the village, and I must say that the appearance of the Australian was most striking. I never remember seeing a shooting suit and necktie of so bold a pattern before. The face, too, above them was to my old-fashioned taste greatly wanting in refinement ; but then it is many years since I left our village, and I am told that young people have become less restrained in everything, even their dress, in that time.

Arthur presented his friend to me, and I found that his name was Robert Smith, and then they both turned and we walked towards the village together. Mr. Smith was just telling me of his impression of England, and I gathered that it was not a particularly favourable one, when I saw George and Hilda coming slowly towards us.

"You should change places with my son," I said, "for he does not like the colonies and must go back, and you do not care for England."

He laughed in a way I did not like, for my remark, though idle, was not meant to be a joke.

"Why, here is George !" interrupted Arthur Jeffreys. "And Hilda is with him."

I heard Mr. Smith mutter something under his breath. Of the beginning of the sentence I am by no means sure ; if it were not impossible I should have said that it sounded like an oath, but I caught the words "pretty girl," and knew that they referred to Hilda, for he was looking at her as if quite taken aback by her

beauty. She came up to us with the self-possession that never deserted her, though she must have seen the impression she made on Arthur's friend, and spoke to me; then she turned to the young men, and Mr. Smith was introduced to her.

"Glad to make your acquaintance," he said with a clumsy bow, and she smiled on him as kindly as if he had been the veriest courtier.

"Well, old fellow," said Arthur, turning to George, "the governor tells me that you're not going to stay over here any time. That's a mistake. You should make hay while the sun shines."

"That's just what I'm trying to do."

"Afraid the sheep will die if you're not there to physic them?"

"I'm not rich in sheep. But things go wrong, you know, if one's not there to look after them."

"Ah! that comes of being a man of property. Now a poor beggar like me could stay away from his business for ever and it'd be none the worse."

"And this is your first visit to England," I heard Hilda's clear voice saying. "And are you pleased with it? Pray do not say that you are not; I shall take it as quite personal."

"It is the finest land I have ever seen," replied Mr. Smith. "And the ladies are——" He stopped as if unable to find words to express his admiration.

Hilda laughed, and I could see that she was gratified, though I thought the young man too free.

"You live here?" he asked presently, and waited with attention for her answer.

"Oh, yes. That is our house, the white one, along the road to the left. We shall see you, no doubt. Mr. Jeffreys is an old friend of ours."

He looked from her to me as if he were speculating on our relationship to each other, and I should have liked to tell him at once exactly what it was. But Arthur was sure to do that and nip this little flirtation in the bud.

"Well, good-bye, old chap," said Arthur Jeffreys, leaving George's side. "Come and have a pipe to-night, and tell us some more about the blacks. Come, Smith, we mustn't keep Mrs. Gordon any longer." And the two young men left us, raising

their hats, Mr. Smith's bow being directed to Hilda in the most marked manner.

"And so that is the millionaire," said Hilda, looking after them.

"I don't think much of his clothes," returned George. "He looks a bounder too."

Which is, I suppose, a colonial term of contempt. Hilda did not answer, and the young man was so little in my style that I had nothing to say in his praise, so kept silence.

A few days after this we were invited to tennis at the Cheltnams', and almost the first person I saw as I went into the garden was Mr. Smith in a costume that was rather more *voyant* than his first one. Hilda also had on a new and very pretty dress that had the effect of making the wearer look particularly bewitching. They were talking together, and were evidently on the best terms.

"This is not quite in our line," said Mr. Jeffreys, fetching me a garden chair; "I am too old for it, and you, Mrs. Gordon, are too graceful for it. But let us look on together."

Our vicar paid his little compliments with the elegance of forty years ago when we were boy and girl together, and he had not forgotten how to say charming things in a charming way to his old friend.

The first game was played by Mr. Smith, Hilda, George and Arthur. I am no judge of play, but it seemed to me that my boy held his own amongst them. Mr. Smith and Hilda were partners, and I could hear him praising her way of playing, which I am told is very good. When it was over they came and stood near us, and the Australian hovered about her in a way I did not like; for he must have been told of her engagement to George.

"Now, Miss Cheltnam," he began, "you're so awfully rough on a fellow, I couldn't take all the balls."

"I didn't expect you to take all, only one now and then, just to keep them from winning."

"You shouldn't, you really shouldn't jump on a fellow like that."

"No, Hilda," said Arthur, looking laughingly at his friend's somewhat stout figure. "You should spare him, he's such a weakling."

Hilda laughed.

"Then perhaps, Mr. Smith, you might like some tea to support you. I will show you where it is to be had."

George looked as if he expected her to include him in the invitation, but she did not, and I fancied that he had a pained expression on his face as they walked towards the dining-room. Arthur must have had the same thought, for he smacked George on the back and said in his cheery way :

"Now, old man, wake up. These dreamy manners may fascinate the blacks, but we're not educated up to them. I'm going to take Mrs. Gordon to get some tea, and you'd better come too."

"What a remarkably well-informed young fellow that friend of yours is, Arthur," said Mr. Cheltnam, joining us in the dining-room, where Mr. Smith and Hilda were carrying on their interrupted talk with bursts of noisy laughter.

"Oh, he's a good sort enough."

"Now, what do you suppose that he's worth?" continued Mr. Cheltnam curiously. "I've been told that it's a million, but that's impossible, I suppose."

"Oh, somewhere about that," was Arthur's careless answer as he pushed forward an easy-chair for me.

"Dear me! dear me! is he now? Well, he's a lucky man!"

Arthur laughed, for Mr. Cheltnam's worship of money was well known to us all.

"I should just like to have a little more talk with him about Melbourne," continued Mr. Cheltnam, hastily crossing the room to pay homage to the lucky man in question, who appeared anything but glad at his approach, while Hilda frowned in a way that was rather peculiar under the circumstances. I hoped that George had not seen it, and I do not think that he had, for he was unsuspicious as a child, and when I saw the open honest look on his brave young face, I blamed myself for my uncharitable nature; but being a silent person it has always been my habit to observe both people and things closely, without, heaven knows, any intention of fastening evil on them, though perhaps in this case I was rather more censorious than usual; but then my son's happiness was at stake.

That was the beginning of a great many parties at all of which Mr. Smith figured. I saw nothing to make me alter my first opinion of his want of refinement, but nobody else seemed

to observe it, and he was rather popular on the whole. The Cheltnams, particularly, found him remarkably entertaining, for I saw him, or heard of him, at their house almost every day. And I think that it was about this time that George began to talk of his return to Africa. Preparations for the wedding had been going on in a quiet way ever since his arrival. Hilda had bought a great many of her things, and though the date was not actually fixed, we understood that it would be in rather more than a month.

George and I were sitting one evening under the old pear tree on the lawn, and he was telling me that he would have to go up to London to buy some things he wanted to take back with him, and make several business arrangements.

"And then," he said, "I shall take our berths."

I knew this meant parting, and I put my withered hand on his strong brown one as it lay on the bench beside me. He bent and kissed my forehead, and I felt that he understood my grief at his going, though I would not speak of it to distress him.

He left for town a day or two afterwards, and I saw rather less of the young people while he was gone. I went to the Cheltnams' as usual, but Hilda chanced each time to be out, and knowing that she must be hard at work with preparations, I paid no attention to her absence. But one evening, as I was going to the Vicarage, a little incident caused me to alter this inattention, and made me long for the wedding to be happily over, though that would be hastening George's departure. I saw under the shade of the lime trees that edge the road, two figures walking slowly together, and I quickly recognized them for Hilda and Mr. Smith. There was something particularly lover-like in the way they were sauntering along and the frequent pauses they made. I cannot say that I was so much surprised as vexed at the sight, for I always knew Hilda to be hungry after admiration, and the Australian's free expression of it had flattered her from the first. I would not admit, even to myself, that their being together in this way was anything more serious on her side than thoughtless vanity, and I stoutly clung to my old belief that once married she would make George a good wife. A bye-path turned off to my left, and I took it, not wishing to embarrass the pair by meeting them just then. I found Mr. Jeffreys pruning his rose trees, and after getting his promise to assist a girl in the village, I began to

talk of his guest, hoping to hear that his visit was nearly at an end.

"Mr. Smith is making a long stay with you," I observed tentatively.

"Ay," answered the vicar carelessly. "I fancied that he would have found us such quiet folk that he would have gone long ago."

"I daresay he will be going back to London soon."

"Well, I believe not ; Arthur tells me that he thinks of staying some time longer. I'm not exactly glad to hear it, for though he's a good enough fellow, he's not quite my style. I can say this to you without any fear of being thought inhospitable."

My little hope died, and I went rather sadly back to my own quiet house, doubly quiet now with the impending parting with what I most loved hanging over me.

George came home next day in the highest spirits. He was full of his plans for the future. He had bought several things to furnish his house that he was sure Hilda would like ; and he had been over the ship they were to go out in, and was also sure that she would like that. I could see that parting with me was the only thing that at all damped his joy, and did my best to make light of it to him.

He left me early to go to the Cheltnams', but I was surprised that he came back almost immediately, looking annoyed and crestfallen.

"That bounding beast Smith was there," he said, throwing himself on his old chair in a tired way. And I felt angry, for I could imagine the sort of scene that had checked his high spirits like a douche of icy water.

"Mother," he continued, "have you seen much of him at the Cheltnams'? He seemed on precious easy terms there."

"No," I answered, thankful to be able to say it, "I have not seen him there once since you went away." It was quite unnecessary to tell him of having met Mr. Smith and Hilda walking together. It would be giving the fact an importance it did not possess.

"Have you noticed Hilda looking pale or anything?" he asked presently. "She was so quiet to-night that I was afraid she was not well."

"Oh, I don't think it was anything ; perhaps she was tired."

But the explanation did not satisfy him, and he was very silent all the evening. Long after I had gone to my room, I heard him

moving about in his, as he used to when he was a lad and anything had excited him. I could see that he was fidgeting to get away all breakfast time next morning, but I purposely put little delays in his way, for Mrs. Cheltnam disliked too early visitors, and I did not want him to do anything that would offend her just then.

However, at last he would wait no longer, and I walked down the path to the gate with him, and watched his active young figure going quickly down the road. At the bend he turned, and seeing me still at the gate, he waved his hand, while the sunniest smile lit up his face. Things that are small in themselves get stamped on one's mind by what comes after them, and that look and smile I shall never forget.

The day passed quickly with me, for I am always a busy person; and as he did not come back I was glad to think that any little cloud that existed had been explained away. So I sat waiting for him in the drawing-room, prepared to meet him in a mood as happy as his own. I had just told Emma that I would not wait dinner, as he would probably be dining at the Cheltnams', when I heard him coming draggingly up the path. A presentiment almost prevented my moving, but I forced myself to go to the door as if I suspected nothing had happened. There I saw him pausing in the porch evidently trying to look himself, though his poor face was so pale that I was frightened.

When he caught sight of me he smiled in a wan way.

"Late for dinner," he said, attempting to be jovial. "Mother, you shouldn't have waited; I've been for a long walk and am awfully tired."

"Where to?" I asked, pretending not to have seen that anything was amiss

"To Carstone," which is a village at least fifteen miles off.

He was terribly absent at dinner, and I noticed that he ate nothing, just cutting up the food and leaving it untouched on his plate. I could ask him no question; he would tell me all, I knew, when we were together in the quiet room that had been the scene of confession of most of his boyish troubles. And he did. Sitting beside me on the little low sofa he said suddenly:

"It is all off with Hilda and me."

"What!" I cried.

"Don't ask me any questions, mother dear. Perhaps I'll tell

you another time, but not to-night. And I think I'll just go upstairs. You won't mind?"

I should not have minded anything that was a comfort to him, though I grieved that the days were over when he used in his childish sorrows to throw his arms round me and let me soothe away the bitterness of them.

He told me next day that when he got to the Cheltnams', Hilda had seen him alone and told him that, though she was sorry to break off her engagement, she felt as the time drew near for her to leave England that she could not possibly do it. She said she ought never to have promised, for she could not bear to part from her parents and everybody she knew and liked. She did not speak of having ceased to care for him, only of her dread of the rough life abroad. I do not fancy that he urged her to keep her promise, or reproached her for her cruel selfishness in allowing him to hope so long. He just left her without a word and started off on that long solitary walk, the anguish of which I hardly dare to recall.

The people in the village treated the breaking off of the engagement very much as people do treat an uncomfortable occurrence in which two friends whom they know equally well are concerned. After the first blush it was never mentioned, and Hilda's departure on a visit to her sister made this more easy. Nobody was surprised at what she had done: from one or two remarks made to me I gathered that those who knew her best were only surprised that she had kept faithful so long.

"And better now than afterwards," was the general verdict.

In the chill shortening days that followed I had my boy all to myself, and we seemed—though there was a chasm between, to which we never referred—to have gone back to the old days before he went away. Once, with desperate hope, I hinted at his giving up his business in Africa and beginning afresh with me, but I saw that it was of no use, and never spoke of it again.

It was one still September morning that he went away. The sun was shining brightly on the remaining flowers as if trying to warm them into a semblance of their past beauty, and the birds were singing busily before their coming long silence. We went down the path as we so often had done; and at the gate I bid him good-bye just as I should if he had been leaving me for a short visit—we would not recognize what our parting might be. I

watched him going down the road as I watched him when he went to see Hilda for the last time, but he did not turn when he got to the bend now, and I went slowly back into my lonely house.

Life in the village went on in its old routine after his departure. The winter following was a very severe one ; and in the midst of our snow and frost his letters describing the heat out there seemed to me pleasant and bright. He always wrote very cheerfully, telling me of the different things he was doing and how he was succeeding ; and once he spoke—but that was after I told him of Hilda Cheltnam's marriage to Mr. Smith in the spring—of coming home again to see me.

Hilda's wedding was from her sister's house, I am glad to say ; I could not have borne to have gone to it or seen much of it. I sometimes hear of the great state in which she lives ; and I feel that she would never have made my boy happy, so perhaps the lookers-on were right. "Better before marriage than after."

It was nearly a year after George left me that I was sitting on my usual seat under the pear tree one hot drowsy afternoon. My quiet life must encourage habits of growing old age, for I dozed first of all, and then went off into a sleep and dreamt of my son, as I so often do. A movement near woke me with a start, and I saw Mr. Jeffreys coming very slowly round the house. Gathering my shawl round me, I rose with a laugh and went to meet him.

"You caught me napping," I said. "See what an old woman I'm getting."

"It is very warm," he answered in a constrained voice. "I don't wonder that you went to sleep. Let us come into the drawing-room out of the sun."

I thought his manner so peculiar that I began to wonder what could have brought him—what he could possibly have to say. When we got into the drawing-room he closed the door behind us, and taking my hand led me to my chair, then stood before me with the sun shining full on his snow-white hair.

"My dear old friend," he said, and there was a little break in his voice, "I have known you so long that I feel the best and kindest thing to do is to tell you at once that I have had bad news of George. You will be brave, as you always are."

For a moment the light went out of the room.

"Tell me what it is," I heard my own voice as if it belonged to another person saying presently.

Mr. Jeffreys drew a chair to mine and again took my hand—holding it firmly to give me support.

"He has been very ill, I fear," he said.

"Yes?"

"Very, very ill!"

"He is coming home an invalid?"

"No!"

And then I understood. My boy was dead.

A long time afterwards I saw a letter written by a friend of his to Mr. Jeffreys at his request when he knew there was no hope, asking that the news should be broken gently to me. His friend wrote that he had never been really well since his return from England, and that was why he had not been able to rally from a sharp attack of fever. He talked constantly of me, and hoped that I should not miss him very much, and indeed, as time goes on I do so less and less, for I seem to be getting so near to him and his father that it is not worth while to fret, because it is such a very little space that now divides us.

HANNAH MARTIN.

An Incident of the Cholera in Spain.

I.

ONLY a Spanish lad of seventeen or so, poverty-stricken, obscurity-hidden, yet as true a hero, in the best sense of the word, as the world has known.

He was in no whit different from any one of his fellows ; there was nothing particularly heroic about his appearance, nothing to distinguish him among the crowd of youths of his own age, a company of whom—their olive skins, flashing black eyes, and picturesque costumes of themselves offering bits of colour that would have sent the passion for representation tingling to the very finger-tips of an artist—were wont to hang about in the streets and *plazas* of sunny, white-walled, languid-atmosphered Llevisa. There, in the eating of oranges and *turrone*s, the smoking of innumerable cigarettes, and the hearing and telling of bull-fight gossip, he lived his glowing southern life on the approved principle of getting the very most out of it on the score of enjoyment that the passing day could give him. *Dum vivimus, vivamus*, was the unspoken motto of his life, and he lived up to it for all he was worth. He worked, when occasion called upon him to work ; but his wants were few and easily supplied. Given one single peseta, value ninepence half-penny, in the pocket of his ragged breeches, and it was enough : till his money was spent, Pedro Alvarez took holiday without scruple or hindrance.

In the eyes of present-day moralists, all the religion he had to boast of would have amounted simply to nothing. He fell on his knees devoutly whenever the tinkle of a silver bell announced the passing by of the Host ; he had as utter and orthodox a horror of a heretic as of cold water—other than for drinking purposes ; he enjoyed the processions and shows of Holy Week with all his heart and soul—though it did not enter his head to note the special events supposed to be commemorated thereby, and he confessed whenever occasion or conscience seemed to

require it. There his religion, so to speak, ended : the devoted and passionate love with which he regarded not alone his widowed mother and the sister to whom he stood as sole protector, but those whom he chose to reckon his friends, not coming under this heading, of course. In these days of enlightenment and higher culture his ignorance was equally surprising. Had any one attempted to explain to him the meaning of *altruism*, for example, Pedro would only have stared uncomprehendingly ; and, while rejoining, with the unfailing courtesy of his nation, "*No entiendo, señor,*" would have retired entertaining private doubts of his informant's sanity. Perhaps his utter ignorance of the meaning of the term only helped him eventually to the better living out of it. So time slipped away with him until the summer that the cholera came to Spain, and, in due course, following inexorably where the finger of defective sanitation unerringly pointed out the way, to Llevisa.

Then for one awful week there was a reign of terror within the walls, a grim, unseen horror overshadowing the outwardly fair city. Among the very first upon whom the dread enemy laid its cold hand was the Alvarez family ; and within two days after the first fatal outbreak, Pedro, motherless, sisterless, and to all intents and purposes homeless, wandered, a lonely outcast, about the hot and dusty streets. He had unwound the yellow silk sash or *faja* from his waist, and replaced it by one of rusty black ; the *borlas* or tassels to match, lately decorating the hat worn so jauntily to one side, had in like manner been torn ruthlessly from their places, and with nothing but these poor signs of mourning to bear silent but eloquent witness to his loss and sorrow, he left the spot that he could no longer call home, to wander restlessly about the streets. Past the fountain in the *plaza*, through quaint horse-shoe arch and Moorish gateway, on by the fragments of decaying ruins—their beauties, a memory of the past, hidden beneath the inevitable present-day coating of whitewash or stucco—the spirit of restlessness urged him. Fragments of history, over which a tourist would have gloated for hours, lay on either hand, or, in the form of slender pillar, crumbling gable, or decaying arch, soared high above his head as he traversed the narrower and older streets ; but they obtained from this son of the people scarcely more than a passing glance, for the eyes of the ignorant are proverbially blind. What did it

matter to him that the gateway leading to the *patio* of the house on his left, a miracle of art, with the delicate lacework tracery of the workmanship, dated back to a period earlier than the fourteenth century ; that those oddly-fashioned blue and white tiles, let into the woodwork above, were treasures that English strangers would travel miles to see? The *Qué se me da á mi?* element was very strong in Pedro Alvarez : hence to him all such things counted as far less worthy of notice than the huge posters disfiguring the wall just beyond, at which, although he could not read a word of them, he had been wont to gaze with a mixture of awed delight and curiosity. He could comprehend their signification at least ; knew for what the three words at the top stood, printed in the largest and blackest of type ; knew, too, that beneath them, with that flow of the grandiloquent in which your true Spaniard delights, it was duly set forth that on such a date, and at such an hour, six "bulls of death" from the noted herds of the most famous breeder in Spain were doomed to bite the dust beneath the sword of the celebrated *torero*, Leon Marcial Diaz, the prince of the noble art of *tauromaquia* in the south of the Peninsula.

To the lonely and homeless a crowd is attractive. Trace the instinctive longing for the society and companionship of one's fellow-creatures to what source you will, it is there. As safety is said to exist, so there may be sympathy, long drawn out, distilled, in numbers. Where the crowd led Pedro Alvarez followed instinctively, but without remembering that the day was Sunday, and in consequence that set apart for the bull-fight.

"Ah, pardon, señor, I did not see you."

Some one, running heedlessly or blindly past, had brushed roughly against the lad as he made his way listlessly along. It was a child, and a small child at that, an olive-skinned, black-eyed girl of nine or ten years' or so. Her head was protected from the glare of the afternoon sun only by the long tresses of thick dark hair, the glory of the daughters of Spain, and bare too were the small brown feet revealed by the short gay skirt. A street child, her manners as free and easy as those of the rest of her class, her glances each a flash of dark-eyed witchery ; yet with the instinctive inborn Spanish courtesy ever present to round off the crude angles, to take the sting out of the smart jest sure to be called forth on an ordinary occasion by this chance collision

with the tall lad. But the eyes that looked up at the latter now were heavy and tear-dimmed beneath their long lashes, and the voice was quivering on the verge of a sob. Each recognized the other in an instant.

"Mariquita! You! And in tears. What is the matter?"

"Ah, Pedro, for the love of heaven do not hinder me! Indeed, I dare not stay."

The trembling voice broke down, and the speaker, as if regretting even this momentary delay, darted up the street with the speed of a lapwing. Not alone, however; Pedro, eager and questioning, kept easily by her side.

"But, *niñita*, tell me—where are you going?"

"Ah, do not stop me! To the Plaza de Toros!"

"The Plaza de Toros?"

"Yes, yes! It is Carlos that I want—do you not see? It is for Ines, Pedro; Ines, my sister, my darling—she is dying!"

Mariquita sobbed out her story as the two hurried along. How, barely two hours ago, *it*—there was no need to particularize further what was meant—had struck down Ines, her dearly-loved sister; how an old neighbour, the only one at hand to give help or comfort to the orphaned sisters, had declared the case to be one beyond hope; and how the sick girl, already, it would seem, in the cold grip of the skeleton fingers, had moaned out an earnest wish to bid her lover farewell. No need to explain to Pedro further. Carlos Desgracia was an intimate of his own; and as one of the *chulos* belonging to the *cuadrilla* or troupe of Leon Marcial Diaz, would be that afternoon at his accustomed post.

"I sent Pepe, that little lad, to the Plaza to tell him—I had no one else," sobbed the heart-broken sister. "But Ines is sinking fast, and he has not come. And Pepito is but a child, he scarcely understands; and he would linger to watch for Diaz, to see the *picadores* ride in, to look at all that passes, and forget the errand."

As if impelled by the recollection to further exertions, she quickened her pace as she spoke. But Pedro laid his hand on her arm and detained her.

"Listen!" he said abruptly. "I will go to the *Plaza*; it is not for a girl like you to go there alone. Besides, I am known as a friend of Carlos, and I can get to him without

hindrance. Now go back to Ines, little one, and I will send him to you."

Mariquita sobbed out her thanks. "You will find him, Perico, *por cierto*? He will be sure to come?"

"By that cross he shall!" He made the sign with his fingers as he spoke, and the two parted; Mariquita to hasten back to her dying sister, Pedro Alvarez to run like a greyhound to the Plaza de Toros. Those who cling to the common belief that the natives of Spain are utterly incapable of physical exertion, in place of being actually agile and swift-footed beyond ordinary, would have been sensible of a rude shock to their convictions had they seen the speed with which he threaded his course then through the crowded streets. Three minutes after parting from Mariquita he had reached his destination, and was shouldering and elbowing a path for himself through the crowd already surging round the *entrada general*.

The scene around him was a curious and characteristic one, intensely Spanish in all its bearings. The inevitable beggars were well to the fore, of course, pleading for charity from all the passers-by, not excepting even the groups of gorgeously-attired bull-fighters themselves, passing on their way to the entrance; a plea seldom refused, by the way, for the heroes of the ring are not as a rule more niggardly of their earnings than careful of their lives. A strange and motley scene, in which the figures, with their intense individuality, vivid colouring and characteristic dress, from the bright handkerchiefs on the heads of the women, the smart *majo*, or peasant-dandy costume of the younger men, and the brilliant showy attire of the *toreros* themselves, stood out with the sharpness of cameos. A living picture, every figure instinct with vitality, with movement; its background the white houses and walls of the southern city, and high overhead the blue brilliant sky of sunny Spain. A scene of human life, human activity, the pursuit of pleasure, of excitement its one aim; show, glitter and gaiety its leading characteristics; yet not wanting in pathos to those who cared to look just beneath the surface.

See yonder stalwart horseman, pressing his way with good-humoured indifference through the throngs, the crowd parting and falling back to clear a passage for the poor doomed brute that carries him—doomed, for while the rider *may* possibly lose

his life, the horse *must* die. Now he halts, draws rein and bends down from the saddle, a smile breaking over his swarthy dare-devil face. A woman has run out from a group near the entrance, and is lifting a chubby crowing child to the saddle before him ; that is all. Nothing more, and the horse moves on a moment later : yet the simple action is enough to tell that the time of the *corrida* will be an anxious one for the wife of the *picador* in her work at home ; a sound in the street outside will send the blood from cheek and lip, and her glances at the unconscious child at play beside her will hint over and over again the possibility of its having heard for the last time its father's voice. But to all this Pedro Alvarez was too well accustomed to heed it ; intent only on his errand, he had turned away from the general entrance to a small private door, where his recognition as a friend of one of the *cuadrilla* speedily gained him admittance.

II.

MARIQUITA had done injustice to her boyish messenger ; the child had delivered his errand. Pedro had scarcely taken two or three steps along a dark and narrow passage, when some one, coming hastily in the opposite direction, ran almost into his arms. One glance, and he recognized the man of whom he was in search.

Carlos Desgracia was barely four years his friend's senior, keen-eyed, agile, clean and lithe of limb, as in good truth he would need to be, for upon his perfection in these respects depended his life. His frame, shown to the best possible advantage by his close-fitting dress, though slight, was well knit and muscular, and owned not an ounce of superfluous flesh, owing to the rigorous training to which he had been subjected for the past few years. His were the fine dark eyes, well-cut features, and graceful bearing of the typical Andalusian ; and in him at least, thanks perhaps to his youth, or to a possible latent capacity for better things, there was as yet no trace of the repulsiveness, the aspect of brutality, stamped by a brutal sport upon so many of its votaries. But the youth, for he was nothing more, was at present labouring under strong excitement. His nostrils quivered, his black eyes had an angry flash in them, and his teeth were hard set beneath the pale trembling lips ;

while not one whit more vivid was the crimson cloak he carried than the red resentful glow now dyeing his olive-tinted skin. The recognition of each was simultaneous.

"Pedro! You here? But I know your errand—you need not speak."

"Then you know that there is scant time to lose. But—what would you do? What is the matter with you, man?"

For answer the young bull-fighter tore the crimson cloak from his arm, flung the jaunty velvet cap from his head, and, with all the force of which he was capable, dashed them to the ground. His green silk jacket, richly garnished with arabesques of glittering silver, followed suit; and with a gesture of contempt he sprang forward, and setting his foot first on one and then the other, deliberately trampled these, the insignia of his profession, in the dust. Then he turned suddenly on his mystified friend. His face had been crimson before, with anger or shame, but it was pale enough now.

"The matter is that this cursed dress and I part company for ever. Think of it, Perico! This empresario, has he a heart, think you? Was it much to ask, permission to leave, for once, when she, my Ines——"

His voice faltered there and he broke off abruptly. But there was more to say, and a ring of passionate anguish hurried the other broken sentences along.

"That was all I asked—one little hour. But no! We are short-handed already, thanks to this cursed cholera, and to go now—well, then, I need not trouble to return, that is all. Let it be so! What care I? There, and there, and there." The hot southern blood was at fever heat, and with each reiterated word he stamped his foot passionately on the discarded garments in the dust.

"And Diaz? What said he?"

Carlos laughed the mocking laugh of reckless despair.

"Diaz! He? The man has less heart than one of the *toros*. *Caramba!* when he bade me wait, for that an hour or so could make little matter, I could have seized the sword at his elbow and turned it upon himself. Wait, said he? *Will the cholera wait?* . . . Lend me your *capa*, *amigo*. Had I my clothes here, the son of my father would prove to the eyes of all that he had done with the *cuadrilla* of Leon Diaz for ever!"

He seized the cloak handed to him by Pedro and shrouded himself in its ample folds, by way of hiding the depredations already made on his costume. For his part, Pedro stooped and silently lifted the jacket, cap and gay silken cloak, shaking the dust in turn from each. Not until he had got all three into his hands did he stand up and face his friend. The latter, with a gesture denoting utter contempt, as if shaking the dust of the bull-ring from his feet, had turned to go on his sad errand.

"But the mother? The children?"

Carlos did not answer. Yet he halted, sharply, for he understood. Love and reverence towards parents is a strong characteristic of the youth of Spain; and none knew better than the young *chulo* that not alone his aged father and mother, but three or four small brothers and sisters, were entirely dependent upon the three pounds or so, the stake at which he was in the habit of setting his life every Sunday throughout the "season," with an occasional engagement thrown in between on a week day. It was a hard strait for a youth of two-and-twenty; and the hideous spectre of cholera was already a dire enough phantom to face, without a prospect of coming to closer quarters with the gaunt grim wolf of famine ever dogging its steps, and already visible through the shadowy drapery of its skirts. He turned round on his friend, his face white with the agony of conflicting feelings.

"*Dios mio!* It is hard! I am between the sword and the wall."

Pedro was not looking at him. One of the silver arabesques had become detached from the brilliant green jacket, and he was searching for it among the dust at his feet. Having secured it, he stood erect and met the other's eyes.

"Go," he said briefly. "But first—I have these, but I want the rest."

"What mean you?"

"Only that I have sworn you shall go, and go you shall! Yet one of the *cuadrilla* shall not be missing, nor the mother and children starve."

Carlos stared at his friend, as if doubting the evidence of his ears.

"It is nothing, *hijo mio*. Give me your clothes, your *capa* here, and the thing is done. We are the same height, you and I, and not so much unlike in feature."

The other still gazed wonderingly at him, and the hard expression on his face softened strangely, then vanished altogether as he caught his friend's hand.

"You are good, Perico, too good a friend for one such as I, but it cannot be! How could I let you run this risk? If you came to harm your blood would be on my hands for ever."

"I shall come to no harm," persisted the younger lad earnestly, forgetting himself altogether in his sympathy with his friend and desire to serve him. "Have I not seen you play the part a thousand times, and do I not know it by heart?"

"*Querido*, it is utter madness! The first to-day is El Bravo, of the Miura breed. . . . And you have had neither experience nor training."

But Pedro, lost in his generous self-surrender to all considerations of prudence, could meet and parry even so indisputable a fact as that.

"True it is. Yet have I not heard you say hundreds of times that a cool head, a quick eye and active limbs were all that a man needed in the ring, after all? Look at me, man. Will not mine serve my turn for once?"

The other still eyed him doubtfully, a host of varied emotions chasing each other over his dark handsome face. It was the conflict between love and friendship; and, as is almost inevitable when two such alternatives are involved, the former won.

"Come, then!" he cried almost fiercely, seizing his friend by the arm and dragging him towards a recess where they could be hidden from view. "*Madre de Dios!* that I should be tempted thus. . . . Yet it is for her, for her alone. Now, Pedro, quick! Quick, I say! The time is all but gone!"

And they were quick. In less time than it had ever taken him before, Carlos had stripped off his glittering dress and was helping his substitute to don it, fastening the gay jacket and orthodox silk sash with trembling fingers, and draping the show silken cloak—to be presently exchanged for the tattered one in actual use during the combat—in correct style over the arm of his friend. The clothes fitted the latter perfectly, for the two youths were much the same as regarded height; and for the rest, Pedro, though four years the other's junior, was fully as well-built and manly in appearance as the young bull-fighter. Above their heads the echoing tramp of feet told that the spectators were

taking their places, and beyond the recess in which they stood the crowd was still pouring in ; a confused hum of voices, of careless mirth, free jest and smart repartee, coming plainly to their ears. Here were the sharpest contrasts, as must ever be the case when lookers-on and players are concerned : the comedy of life, and its intensest depth of tragedy, within touch, and parted from one another merely by the slight partition of a few boards.

Carlos, his eyes shining like stars with the force of the mingled emotions that swayed him, looked his friend critically over, and stepping back, silently wrung his hand. Three minutes later, dressed in the shabby clothes of his companion and muffled to the eyes in the latter's cloak, he slipped out into the street, while Pedro, obeying his last hurried directions, found himself outside the recess, in the middle of the glittering group formed by the waiting *cuadrilla*. Several of the men stared at him curiously, but although a word or two of remonstrance came to his ears, no one seemed to care to interfere actively in the matter. Already the presence of the cholera had begun to make itself felt ; that day, as Carlos had hinted, there would be no substitutes, and another defaulter could not well be spared : indeed, in view of these and other circumstances, it had at one time been thought advisable to put off the fight. But the fear of an outbreak among the people, who, in spite of the nominal authority of the president, are the actual rulers of these spectacles, induced the authorities to remain inactive and to permit the amusement. So the signal was given, the trumpet sounded ; and the young lad, in the complete forgetfulness of self which must of necessity lie at the root of every generous action, went forward, for the sake of his friend, to meet and to brave a dreadful death.

He could not but feel strange when, a few minutes later, he found himself making one of the customary procession, as, headed by the redoubtable Diaz himself, it slowly filed round the arena. Had the latter glanced with any heed at his men, in place of merely flinging away the cigarette he had been smoking and stepping to his post at their head with all his wonted swagger and off-hand bearing, he must have noticed the defection of Carlos Desgracia. But the latter's substitute contrived to hang in the background, sheltering himself behind one of the miserable hacks ridden by the *picadores* ; so that the familiar habili-

ments alone caught the eye, and the face of the wearer escaped notice altogether. Immediately afterwards, in obedience to a sign from one of his companions, who, having a shrewd guess as to how matters stood, was willing to do a good turn for a comrade's sake, he was standing in his appointed place, close to the barrier, his eyes fixed on the great iron gates opposite, beyond which was the *toril*, waiting for the bull. The game had begun, a game in which life was the stake and "Væ victis" the motto.

III.

How long the gates were in opening—and the bull—Ha! there he came at last, in good earnest, ready for the fray too. Ay, thoroughly ready for it the huge black brute looked, as with lowered head and gleaming horns he trotted forth from his den to the middle of the arena, to be greeted with a deafening roar of welcome, excitement and execrations from the vast multitude assembled above. Slowly his red eyes glanced from one to another of the gorgeous resplendent figures before him, motionless as statues, but watchful as cats, as if doubtful with which to begin; and Pedro, as he eyed him, realized, with a momentary quickening of his pulses, that this was no other than the bull of the *corrida*, El Bravo himself.

The pause was not a long one. In another moment one of the *picadores*, eager to have first innings in the dreadful, dangerous game, spurred his blindfolded horse a few paces forward and succeeded in drawing the bull's attention to himself. This, so to speak, opened the ball; for El Bravo, true to his name, was, to borrow a term from the slang of the bull-ring, as *bueno a toro* as had ever appeared in Llevisa, and stood in need of no rousing to the attack. Then the revolting, demoralizing spectacle, with the fearful peril menacing human life, with the nameless barbarities inflicted on the helpless brutes that formed its living victims, began. But to this aspect of the life and death struggle in which he now found himself irrevocably engaged, Pedro Alvarez was altogether blind. No *majo*, no sample of young Spain, in the full enjoyment of his national pastime, shouting himself hoarse with mad excitement over the prowess of his favourite *lidiador*, or hissing with equal vehemence his smallest slip, had been accustomed to enter more thoroughly than himself, heart

and soul, into the demoralizing sport. Brought up as he had been, it would have been strange, all but impossible, had there existed for him a game on earth half so exciting as the *corrida*, any greater heroes than the athletic combatants of the ring. As an instance of the peculiar, almost incomprehensible ascendancy exercised by the national sport over its devotees, it is enough to say that had Pedro Alvarez been asked the question, a day or two ago, as to which man throughout the length and breadth of Spain he reckoned most worthy of envy, his answer would have been as unhesitating as prompt. Not the sagacious statesman Sagasta, not Castelar of the silver tongue, not even his most Catholic Majesty Alfonso XII. himself; but the famous *torero*, the renowned *primer espada*, Leon Marcial Diaz. In like manner, to go back a few years further, Serrano, Topete, even Prim himself, would have ranked far below such noted bull-fighters as Montes, José Delgado and Frascuelo; while it goes without saying that Espartero the patriot must have taken a place immeasurably lower than Espartero the *matador*.

Hark! what is that? A heavy crash, a muffled groan—a *picador* is down, horse and all; the poor blindfolded brute has stumbled and the two lie prostrate together on the sand of the arena. And there, not six yards distant, up comes Tóro, his fierce eyes fixed on his destined victims, intent only on their destruction, and heedless of the frantic exertions of the other *chulos*, harassing him in flank and rear, but unable to succeed in distracting him from his game. Now's your time, Pedro! in the position you occupy now, it all depends upon, all rests with you. To hesitate means certain death to yonder poor fellow, father and sole support of six hungry children at home, to whom not alone his fallen steed, but the cumbersome garments he wears, padded to a sufficient depth to resist a horn thrust, are bidding fair to prove fatal. There is the unfortunate horse, too, for any one that may care to heed it, now struggling to regain its feet, and—shame that it must be said—unpitied of one single human being in that vast multitude. What matter! In the eyes of public and performers alike, the horse is only part of the show; it was brought there to be killed and must fulfil its destiny. But it is not upon the unconscious horse, now standing broadside on to those long sharp horns, that the fierce red eyes of the brute coming on in his resistless charge are fixed; the destined victim

is the rider, who, injured by his fall and completely helpless, is at the mercy of the infuriated bull. It is an awful moment, for a human life is trembling in the very balance, on the verge of a terrible fate. A breathless suspense holds that vast circle of spectators silent, save for a hissing prolonged gasp, the concentrated feeling of thousands, sent up by the congested masses above. But human sacrifice at least is no part of the sport, and Diaz, his swagger and the air of cool *insouciance* with which, while awaiting his turn, he has been watching the fight, now completely lost sight of, lays his hand on the barrier and vaults into the arena, his bright sharp Toledo beneath his arm, ready, with the characteristic daring that will lead him in a few minutes to face the bull single-handed, to come to close quarters with him now. But there is no need for the *matador* to anticipate himself to end the tragedy before its time. Novice though he may be, Pedro Alvarez knows the duty demanded from him as the substitute of Desgracia, and he does it for all he is worth. Let but his foot slip, let the slightest accident induce him to stagger at that supreme moment, and a fate too terrible to contemplate will be his. So near is he to the bull that the hot breath surges up in his face and the rough hide actually brushes him as he flings the tattered yet ample folds of the crimson *capa* before those eyes of glowing flame ; so near that, as the beast, staggering blindly in his headlong rush, turns towards this new adversary, one of those sharp horns, touching the thigh of the latter, sends a slight stream of blood trickling down those gay silk 'hose ; so near that, in his flying leap at the barrier rising breast high to meet him, the concussion of the following horns against the boarding below nearly sends the lad backward upon them. One moment's eloquent silence, then the pent up relief and enthusiasm break forth simultaneously, and as the gates close behind the injured horseman on his way to the hospital, a deafening shout re-echoes round the building : "Viva ! Bravo, chulo !" Voices alone are not held to be sufficiently expressive ; *majas*, for there is no dearth of women there, wave fans and handkerchiefs, and the men call feet and hands to aid them in giving force to the demonstration of frantic applause. It is the outcome, not alone of relief at the fortunate escape of the horseman, but of sheer admiration of the pluck and agility shown by his daring comrade. The latter quite unused to any such demonstration of popular favour, yet

knowing how to estimate it at its just value—for there are few spectators more hypercritical than a Spanish crowd at a bull-fight—feels completely overwhelmed, and has only presence of mind enough to modestly pick up his tattered cloak, jump the barrier and hasten back to his place.

But from that moment his luck seemed to turn, his fate to be against him. Till now he had kept in the background, leaving to his comrades, rendered expert by training and experience, the actual business to be done. But now, elated by the applause his daring exploit had evoked for him, with every nerve tingling, his pulses beating at fever heat, Pedro lost his head completely, and half a dozen times, but for the gallantry of the other *chulos*, ever ready to risk their lives for a comrade's sake, he was within a hair's-breadth of death. Yet all their dash and daring could not stave off the hand of fate, could not prevent that which was certain to take place, sooner or later. If men, trained from boyhood to their profession, with every advantage that experience, agility and pluck can give them, with eye, foot and hand accustomed to take life in charge unflinchingly, yet atone at times for their daring with their lives, no fate save one could await a novice. . . . There is room for little heart or sympathy among the spectators at a bull-fight; yet it might be questioned if among those thousands of careless onlookers, there was one who would not have felt a pang of regret had they known that the motionless blood-stained figure carried out a few minutes later, was the shattered form of one who, in the very flower of his age, had laid down his life for the sake of his friend. But none knew or heeded, and the fight went raging on, while the youngest *chulo* lay dying in the hospital close at hand.

He lived long enough to receive the last rites, long enough to see and speak to his friend. Carlos had lost count of time and place by the bedside of Ines, and the hasty summons to the bull-ring, to see for the last time the friend who had given his life to serve him, came upon the young bull-fighter like a death-blow.

Pedro turned slightly towards him and held out his trembling hand, a gleam of gladness in the great dark eyes that were already shining with the strange light of death. "Ines," he whispered.

"She is better. They say she will live. But you! . . ." Carlos broke down here, and flinging himself on his knees, hid his face on his crossed arms on the bed. Bull-fighters have

hearts, as parents, wives and children can testify, though the statement may be one to which their upbringing and surroundings might seem to give the lie.

"That is good," Pedro said softly. "Why, man, never grieve for me. The cholera had taken all mine from me and your own were left. I was the one on whom the lot should fall."

They were the last words he spoke. The lamp, burning dimly, cast a faint light on the motionless form on the bed, its gorgeous dress stained with the wearer's life-blood, and on the bowed figure of Carlos, still wearing the ragged clothes that had formed his disguise. Suddenly, from the Plaza close at hand, broke forth a deafening outburst of excitement, increasing in volume till it reached a thunderous roar. It came to the ears of the dying lad; his dim eyes opened and sought questioningly those of his friend.

"El Bravo is down," murmured Carlos. "Diaz has avenged you, lad."

But the other's eyes had gone in the direction of the priest, and the crucifix held before them was all that he seemed to heed.

The world is losing ground, they tell us, growing harder, harsher and colder every day. Self is the idol worshipped by all, and "every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost," would seem to be the watchword of these *fin de siècle* days. Yet it is not so very long ago since the cholera came to Spain. And while hundreds of incidents such as the one rescued by this simple story from oblivion can still take place, even in this nineteenth century, while we can keep our hand on the silver thread that runs through the blackest, meanest depths of human degradation, then the worst pessimist among us need never fear that the world will have grown too bad to live in.

F. B. FORESTER.

That Brooch Business.

By E. N. LEIGH FRY,
Author of "JANET DELILLE," etc., etc.

It happened last year down at the Arbuthnots'. They had a house party, and I was staying there as well as Ella. To prevent mistakes I may as well mention I have no sort of right to allude to her by her Christian name—or, for the matter of that, ever shall have now—but it will save trouble if I call her Ella here—Miss St. Aubyn-Daventry is a mouthful.

She, that is Ella St. Aubyn-Daventry, is an independent orphan, and a very independent one I have heard said. Personally I do not see why she should not be. She has a way of looking you straight in the face and saying what she means; and when she does mean a thing, there is no mistake about it. Also, she has what I've heard a chap describe as "an inconvenient sense of humour." I've noticed we men frequently do find a sense of humour inconvenient in a woman; but I don't know if that's why some of us are always assuring them they have none. This man goes down with some women, and they think him almost as fine a fellow as he does himself—and that's a biggish order. But, Ella—well, I've seen her eyes dancing and twinkling when she looked at him as though she were feeling the joke of him through every bit of her. I heard her say once, "Regarded from different points of view, the human animal may be a comedy, a tragedy, or a farce."

It's only because she's such a regular good sort that she didn't think me a farce last year when—well, I hadn't meant to go into that, but I suppose I may as well now. Besides, I'm not ashamed of it. I asked her to marry me. She was awfully good and let me down as easily as she could. Of course, I hadn't a chance. I knew that all the time, but I thought I might have a try, just in case. It was confounded cheek, of course. Not that she put it like that. She thanked me for asking her, as if it were an honour, and said she thought I had been making a mistake

about my own feelings and would find that out very soon. Then, to make it all pleasant again, she chaffed me a bit about not knowing the prohibited degrees in the Prayer-book, and that a man may not marry his grandmother. Of course she meant being a year or two older than I am. But as I'd been studying that up, I proved to her both history and contemporary observation—I felt I expressed that awfully well—assured us that the happiest marriages were those in which the woman was the older of the two. And then I produced examples: the Brownings, and a lot more. I saw Ella's eyes were beginning to twinkle that way they have; but she was awfully good to me. She was quiet a minute and then she said it was true; age was nothing and love was everything. I said that was what I felt, and I went ahead again about how we had always been such friends, and I had respected her and liked her long before I fell in love with her, and so it was all on a firm foundation. I had been thinking it out beforehand, so I had lots ready to say; and I can always talk to Ella because, besides being so gone on her then, I like her awfully, and she understands what you want to say almost before you have said it. So I went on and said: didn't she know that French definition of friendship, love without wings? And I said I thought the best sort of love must be friendship with wings, for then it would be solid and stay—not like the cherubs in the pictures who, being limited to the wings, can't sit down for obvious reasons. Her eyes twinkled again, and she said, "Yes, but the wings mustn't be tacked on; they must grow." I said whatever her feelings were, at least she must believe I was over head and ears, fathoms deep, in love with her.

"Yes," she said, "Mr. Elliot"—I forgot to say my name is Geoffry Elliot—"but I think if you make up your mind to swim like a man, you'll get to shore again."

And then she held out her hands to me suddenly and said:

"Oh, I hope a nice girl will be happy enough to marry you some day, because I feel you are such a nice boy, and I believe it will last."

I didn't fancy her calling me a boy, but I was glad she thought me nice, though it made me feel humble too. I said:

"Oh, Ella"—I called her Ella that once—"then marry me yourself. If you feel about me like that, it would be all right."

She shook her head very gravely.

"Ah, no," she said, "the only possible excuse for marriage is love."

I had one more try.

"But you give me friendship, and the wings might grow. By-and-by, I shall ask you again."

She didn't answer for a moment. I saw she was setting her teeth and screwing herself up to do something difficult.

"Mr. Elliot," she began, "you mustn't ask again, because it can never be any use. I am going to tell you, because I owe it to you, and because I know you are a true gentleman." She said that, did Ella. "I am going to tell you that I have grown the wings some time ago for somebody else."

I forgot about myself then, and only thought of Ella. I knew it was hurting her awfully to have to say this, and that she was making herself do it because she felt it was her duty to put me out of my misery altogether, and at once if she could. I wanted to help her down easy, only I didn't know how to set about it.

"Nobody knows," she went on, "and the wings must stay folded quite away out of sight—inside."

"Like a ladybird," I said idiotically, because I couldn't think of anything else to say. But it did well enough, for Ella laughed and so did I, and then we shook hands and promised to be friends.

This happened a year before the business at the Arbuthnots'; and on my word, I wasn't sure if I'd done what Ella recommended and swum ashore, till the other chap turned up. But when I found I didn't want to punch his head, of course I knew it was all right. And I just want to say that for real solid friendship, mine for Ella is as good as they make it.

Of course, all this has nothing to do with the diamonds, but I'll get on to them now.

It began one day in Mrs. Arbuthnot's boudoir. She was there, as well as Ella and I, and a curate chap, a sort of cousin of Mrs. Arbuthnot's, who comes to stay there, make himself generally useful and flirt with her. At least, when I suggested the flirting to Ella, she laughed and said: "Don't you think you ought to find a heavier word?" And she was about right, for Mrs. Arbuthnot is an impressive blonde and does most things in a solid, stodgy sort of way. However, she has the curate chap hanging round a goodish bit, and they sympathize with each other—mostly about the evil doings of other people. I think it

is Mrs. Arbuthnot's substitute for flirtation. As for the curate chap, he hangs round chiefly because he knows which side his bread is buttered ; at least, that's my notion.

Mrs. Arbuthnot does not approve of Ella ; above all things she's proper, and she doesn't think Ella is. It puzzled me why, till I heard her discussing it with another woman one day, and then I made out it was on account of one or two things Ella thinks—like what she told me about the only possible excuse for marriage. I heard Mrs. Arbuthnot say : " No girl should think of such things till she is married." It struck me it might be a bit too late to begin then ; but as they weren't speaking to me I held my tongue. And then she went on : " Such ideas in a girl are very indelicate." I wanted to get up and say things, but as they would not have done in the drawing-room, I had to go to the smoking-room and swear at large. But I know this, if ever I marry—and as I don't want to punch the other chap's head now, I suppose I may—I hope it will be a girl who thinks, like Ella, the only possible excuse for it is love.

Well, I must get on.

Mrs. Arbuthnot and Ella were both sewing. I wasn't doing anything in particular, and I fancy the curate chap was under the impression he was making himself agreeable. He came across to Ella and asked in an affable way what she was working at.

" It's a flannel petticoat," she said calmly, and held it out for him to look at.

" Oh," he said with a sort of jump, as if she'd offered him the seven deadly sins for inspection.

I suppose it was tact on Mrs. Arbuthnot's part to explain promptly :

" For the *poor*—the garment is for the *poor*."

He looked kind of relieved, and though I could not quite follow out the idea, I suppose he drew his line somewhere between the clothing of the classes and the masses, and felt that no impropriety could lurk about a charitable petticoat. He may have got acclimatized to them, too, at Dorcas meetings.

To set him completely at his ease, Mrs. Arbuthnot drew his attention to her work.

" I am embroidering a head-flannel for Laura Dudley's baby," she said. " You may remember I am one of the godmothers.

I have all but finished it now, so I shall be able to dispatch the parcel this afternoon."

Evidently a head-flannel (whatever it may be) is all right, for the curate even took up an end of the thing to look at. It was certainly flannel too, but Mrs. Arbuthnot had been fiddling at it with blue silk, while Ella was sewing away like mad with white cotton. And I think Ella's "inconvenient sense of humour" was bothering her. I saw her lips twitch once or twice in a queer way, and I began to think it would be just as well if I did not catch her eye—not that she gave me the chance.

"Well," Mrs. Arbuthnot said after a bit, "I have finished it. Decidedly pretty, too, I think. Look, Ella."

And with that Ella walked across to her and took the thing in her hand to examine. As she did so, she started, and I saw her eyes fixed on the brooch Mrs. Arbuthnot was wearing. Somehow I saw the curate noticed her too. In describing it afterwards, when everybody was talking about the business, I overheard him say: "Her eyes glittered as they fastened themselves on the jewel." I wish I'd wrung his confounded neck, and I don't know why I didn't. The brooch represented two hearts transfixed by an arrow, all thickly encrusted with diamonds. Ella looked at it, then she looked away, and then back again. The curate also mentioned that she did this "with a strange expression of greed." I wish I'd had him to myself for ten minutes in a saw-pit.

Ella gave the work back to Mrs. Arbuthnot and returned with her own to her work-basket, seemingly beginning to arrange its contents. Mrs. Arbuthnot folded up her "garment" and observed:

"The Duncombes are coming on Thursday, and so is Arthur Vibart."

Ella suddenly made a complete upset of her work-basket, and the curate and I went to help her gather up the contents. He wore an apprehensive expression, as though he were not quite sure if further "garments," and not "for the poor," might reveal themselves among the *débris*. He might just as well have left me to do the whole thing; but, of course, Ella has money, and if he disapproved of her, he wasn't above taking her subscriptions. I said he's a fair idea about which side his bread is buttered, and my notion is he likes butter on both sides when he can get it.

"Lady Duncombe is always an addition to a house-party," Mrs. Arbuthnot went on; "she is so well up in everything."

"Her assistance in getting up bazaars for charitable objects is invaluable," the curate remarked, banging his head on the piano as he crawled out from under it with a reel of cotton.

"And Mr. Vibart will be some one quite fresh," said Mrs. Arbuthnot. "He has been out of England three years now—in the Rocky Mountains or somewhere."

Then she murmured something about a letter to write and left the room.

Ella stayed a bit, but she didn't seem to have much to say. At last, she picked up her work-basket and went off too, and I went round to the stables. It wasn't likely I was going to stop there *tête-à-tête* with the curate chap.

It was that afternoon that Mrs. Arbuthnot missed her brooch. She said she must have stuck it in her pincushion when she unfastened it before changing her dress. But when, later in the day, she looked for it again neither she nor her maid could find it anywhere. It had absolutely disappeared.

She was very much put out about it, as it was a valuable brooch, and had been one of Arbuthnot's gifts to her when they were engaged. She came downstairs before dinner feeling, as she said, "upset;" and she had just finished relating the whole history of the brooch and its mysterious disappearance to the company generally, when the door opened and Ella walked in.

She looked awfully fetching. She wore some sort of white dress, with a cluster of scarlet flowers at her breast. And there was something about her—a sparkle in her eyes and a flush on her cheeks, I don't quite know what, only I had never seen her look just like that before. I didn't wonder when I heard one of the men say, "By Jove!" under his breath. The curate, of course, didn't; but something made me look at him, and I saw he was staring like a Gorgon at something on the left side of Ella's bodice. And Mrs. Arbuthnot stepped forward suddenly, exclaiming in a tone that was half relief and half reproach:

"You have got it! But you might have told me you had taken it."

And what she pointed at was two diamond hearts and an arrow in Ella's lace.

Of course, we all looked then, and I saw the flush on Ella's cheeks got a little deeper ; but all she said was :

"Taken what?"

"My brooch," Mrs. Arbuthnot answered.

"This is not your brooch," Ella said ; "it is mine. I noticed you were wearing one like it to-day."

"I never saw you wear that before," said Mrs. Arbuthnot.

"Very likely not," replied Ella. "I never noticed yours until to-day."

"George gave it to me before we were married," said Mrs. Arbuthnot. "He bought it at Heywood and Herbert's. Where did you buy yours?"

"I didn't buy it," said Ella. "It was—given to me."

I saw the curate was watching her—we all were, I believe, for the matter of that—but I saw on his face a sort of expression of pious thankfulness that she had had the grace, at least, to pause before she told that falsehood. Of course, remembering her "expression of greed," he couldn't doubt it was a falsehood. But he looked a degree puzzled too, for it seemed pretty brazen to appear in public, and at once, with an article she had annexed.

"It is very strange," Mrs. Arbuthnot said, "that there should be two exactly alike. Who gave you that?"

Ella's manner was confused. It did look as though she couldn't at the moment hit on a name to give as that of the donor.

"How you catechize!" she said, with a nervous sort of laugh. "One might fancy you thought I had stolen it."

Her eyes fell on the curate as she spoke, and I suppose she realized that was exactly what some of them did think, for she said no more, but held up her head and sailed in to dinner beside the man to whom she had been allotted.

Nothing more was said on the subject in public ; but afterwards, in private and in companies of twos and threes, it was more than thoroughly threshed out. Everybody agreed it was queer, with the exception of Arbuthnot, who didn't want a scandal in the house and dismissed the whole thing as adjectived nonsense.

As for me, I candidly confess I couldn't make head or tail of it. I wanted to kick everybody, only it didn't seem that would do Ella much good, so I just made up my mind I'd stick by her to the last gasp.

Next day things were no less queer. Of course, the disappearance of Mrs. Arbuthnot's brooch had been mentioned to the servants, and any of them could see Ella was wearing one exactly similar. She had it on when she came down to breakfast next morning, and she wore it all day. It really seemed as though she could not separate herself from it. Then it came out that Mrs. Arbuthnot's maid had spoken to Ella's maid about it; and though the latter had been awfully riled at the tone of the other, she let out she had never seen her mistress wear the brooch before, and until yesterday did not even know she possessed it. Of course, Mrs. Arbuthnot's maid passed this on to Mrs. Arbuthnot; and she, finding that Arbuthnot declined to listen and sympathize, confided in the curate. I suppose it wasn't under seal of confession, for he told another lady in strict confidence; the obvious result being that before five o'clock tea every blessed soul in the house was convinced Ella St. Aubyn-Daventry was a thief. I admit "kleptomaniac" was the word most of them used; and one or two went so far as to say they could not *quite* credit it. Also some half-dozen of the men said they didn't care a hang if she had taken the brooch; women were always queer about diamonds, and then she was awfully pretty. But as I heard the Honourable Mrs. Braybrooke-French—the mother of the two plain girls who won't go off—comment darkly: "We all know what *men* are."

I tell you, I was jolly miserable, for it seemed I could do nothing but look on. As I said, kicking was no good, and when I gave my mind in the smoking-room it only made chaff: "Oh, you go on, young 'un, we know all about *you*!" and that sort of thing. I didn't care if they did know. When I was in love with Ella the year before, I wasn't ashamed of it, and I'm not now. But they all seemed to think it took away from the value of my backing her up.

And then I could not tell Ella herself that I believed in her. It seemed like insulting her to assume that anything of the sort was necessary. And I didn't know either how much she knew of all that was being said. She must have known a good deal, however, though she kept up an air of indifference and went about wearing the brooch all day long in the face of everybody. I had to admit there was a sort of nervous excitement about her which I had not noticed before the brooch business; but I thought that was no wonder.

"I never was so thoroughly upset about anything," I heard Mrs. Arbuthnot tell the curate; "never! I feel it is wrong to take no public notice. It ought to be made a police case. But in one's own house—such a scandal!"

The curate shook his head.

"It is very sad," he said, "and very bad. But perhaps one ought to have realized her want of moral principle from—other circumstances."

What he meant by "other circumstances" I don't know—perhaps the "garment." Anyway, I said "D——!" and banged out of the room. I ought to have reversed the order of proceedings, but I couldn't wait till I got into the smoking-room that time.

The Duncombes and Vibart arrived on the Thursday afternoon, and met the rest of us in the drawing-room before dinner. Ella was the last to come down, and again she was all in white, "like an innocent girl," I heard that cad of a curate mournfully mumbling. She hadn't a single ornament about her, except on the left side of her bodice, and there was the diamond brooch.

"You know the Duncombes," Mrs. Arbuthnot said, for she had to keep up an appearance of civility with the criminal—I suppose that is what she and the curate called Ella.

Ella shook hands with Sir James and Lady Duncombe.

"Let me introduce Mr. Vibart," Mrs. Arbuthnot went on.

"We have met before," Ella said, holding out her hand to Vibart.

And just for a moment I thought he wasn't going to take it. His eyes had fallen on the brooch, and a curious sort of expression came on his face—at least, it was more as if some sort of expression had been going to come and he had stopped it. I thought it odd, for he had scarcely had time to hear the story. The next moment he had taken Ella's hand and was answering her:

"Yes, but not for three years."

Dinner went off as usual, though perhaps it was extra lively on account of Lady Duncombe, a good-natured, chatty person, who knows her world to the backbone. When we joined the ladies in the drawing-room afterwards, Ella had been sitting on the sofa talking to her; but presently, she—I mean Ella—got up and I saw her pass out at the French window that stood open. About three minutes afterwards, Arthur Vibart, who was strolling round

the room, looking at the pictures, reached the window, and he, too, went out.

Now, I give you my word, when I did the same I was thinking of nothing on earth but a cigarette on the terrace. We were all apt to dribble out at that window these warm evenings in the dusk, and have solitary smokes or chats of twos or threes as the case might be ; and interfering with any one was as far from my mind as sneaking and listening to what wasn't my business. I can say that on my honour.

I went down the steps of the terrace and strolled along to the far end, where I sat down on a bench just below the balustrade. I felt in my pocket for my cigarette case and got that all right, but when I went on to explore for lights, I found I had none. It was too much bother going back to the house, so I just sat still, thinking, maybe, Vibart might come along and I could borrow a light from him. I had been sitting there some time when I realized in a sleepy sort of way—it was a warm drowsy evening, and very soothing sitting out there in the half-dark—that some one was standing on the terrace above, leaning against the balustrade. I had just arrived at the conclusion it was Ella, when there was a crunch of footsteps beside her, and Vibart's voice said :

“After three years.”

I suppose I ought to have coughed or spoken or done something ; but at the moment there really didn't seem any special necessity for it, and by the time there was—or by the time I was awake enough to realize it—it would have been so awfully awkward for all of us, I simply had to lie low.

“Yes,” Ella answered, in a careless sort of way, “and what have you been doing all the time?”

“Trying to forget you,” he answered very promptly.

And I expect I ought to have bolted then.

“I should have thought that unnecessary,” Ella said rather sarcastically, though, all the same, I knew that minute he was the other chap. Of course, I ought to have bolted, but I made quite sure they would see me if I got up.

“Should you?” he said. “After that day up the river?”

“When people can rush off out of England,” Ella began, “without even—even bidding their friends good-bye——”

“Bidding their friends good-bye!” he broke in. “Sometimes their friends make a rush-off the only thing possible.”

Then there was a pause, and I hoped they would go away, but he began again :

"You're wearing the brooch I sent you after you lost one that day. Ella, how could you let me believe what I did believe then, if all the time you were engaged?"

"Engaged!" she cried indignantly. "Who said I was engaged? and to whom? Am I, by chance, also married? Any information will be gratefully received. It seems I can't know much about myself."

I was not quite sure whether I was sorry for Vibart or envied him just then. Of course, I couldn't see Ella from where I sat, but I knew pretty well she'd got her neck straight up that way she has, and her head in the air, and her eyes flashing like anything. But, then I knew she wouldn't be so angry with him unless——.

"You weren't engaged!" he said. "Mrs. Braybrooke-French told me next day you were—to Sir Henry Bruton—for certain."

"And you believed her," Ella said sarcastically. "A man is an intelligent being! Didn't you know she wanted you for Fanny?"

My word! I thought, did she? For Fanny is the one with the tin-plated giggle that Mrs. Braybrooke-French and Mrs. Arbuthnot had been chucking at my head ever since I came down. I suppose that's not "indelicate," by the way. For you'll notice it's what they do—I mean the sort that are down on girls for thinking out things before they are married, and feeling about it like Ella.

"You were not engaged?" he said. "I never heard out there, and I thought you might be married. And when I came back, somehow—well, somehow I couldn't get your name out to ask about you. Then I came down here, and—and you're wearing the brooch. Weren't you even engaged then?"

"If you had particularly wanted to know, you might have come to ask," Ella said, pretty sharp.

And I don't mind saying here, I've always thought Vibart was a blazing idiot not to have done that. I'm very good friends with him now; but I've always thought, and I always will, that that time he was just a blazing idiot. If it had been me, it isn't anything an old cat like Mrs. Braybrooke-French said would have sent me bolting off to the Rockies without having it out with

Ella herself first. Besides, I know her better than to suppose she'd ever play that sort of game with a man.

"You might have come to ask," said Ella.

"You mean?" he said. "Do you mean, if I had asked you, you would——?"

"I suppose I do," Ella answered very softly.

And I felt an infernal cad to be sitting there listening. It seemed to matter such a lot more than when she was slating him.

"I—I sat and waited," Ella went on, "and you went away. You had said so much, and not—just enough, and——"

"You might have known," he said, "when I sent the brooch."

"Yes," she returned, as quick as lightning, "and *you* might have known when I didn't send it back. A woman could not accept a thing like that from a man, unless——"

"I suppose I was a fool," he said, and he seemed ashamed of himself, which I thought was just as well; "but I didn't think about that, and they say women stick to diamonds when they get the chance."

Ella laughed a little.

"That's what they seem to think here, anyhow," she said, "as I am supposed to have stolen your brooch."

"Stolen it?"

"Yes. I have never worn it since that one week when I—when I was—waiting for you. But when I heard the other day you were coming here, I—well, I thought I'd put it on. It was letting myself down, I know, but I thought—I have always wondered if, perhaps, there had been a mistake, and I—well, I thought I might find out. Perhaps, after all, I would not have gone on wearing it till you came if I hadn't been so angry with them all. I believe I have just been doing it in defiance. Mrs. Arbuthnot had one like it, though, oddly enough, I never noticed it till that very day I heard of you, and somehow it has disappeared. And every single soul in the house, except Geoffry Elliot, believes I stole it."

I liked the freedom and energy with which Vibart expressed himself about the whole Arbuthnot party; I expect he picked it up in the Rockies.

"Come," he concluded, "let us go in and tell them now."

"Tell them what?" Ella asked.

"That I gave you the brooch three years ago, and I won't have such infernal nonsense talked about my promised wife."

"Have I promised?" Ella inquired very demurely. "I don't seem even to remember your asking me."

Well, I did bolt then. I went off like a rabbit, across the grass, round the house and in at the front door. I found out afterwards neither of them ever saw me, so I might just as well have done it first as last and saved myself from feeling such a sneaking cad.

I went straight to the drawing-room, for I didn't want to miss seeing all these idiots put to confusion when Vibart came in to give them his mind. But I must say he didn't hurry himself, and I got rather tired waiting for the *dénouement*—I think that's the expression. The last post arrived in the interval, but there was nothing for me. Mrs. Arbuthnot had two or three letters. I happened to glance at her as she was reading the last, and I wondered if there was anything wrong, she looked so uncommonly uncomfortable.

She had it in her hand still when the window was pushed open and Vibart came in with Ella. He walked straight up to Mrs. Arbuthnot in a sort of way that made every one in the room stop talking to see what was going to happen.

"I hear," he said, "that some ridiculous nonsense has been talked here about Miss St. Aubyn-Daventry, the lady whom I am going to marry——"

The newspapers would put "Sensation" here in brackets. Everybody looked at Ella. She was holding her head up and looking at no one in particular, which was perhaps why her eyes caught mine. I just let her see it was all right and I meant to go on sticking by her and him too. She blushed like anything and smiled back. And after that she didn't hold her head quite so stiff.

"I understand," Vibart was going on, "that some have even had the audacity to imply Miss St. Aubyn-Daventry stole the diamond brooch she is now wearing. I have the pleasure of telling these"—and he said "these" as if they were a new kind of vermin—"that I gave her that brooch myself three years ago, before I left England. And if you like," he said, addressing Mrs. Arbuthnot more particularly, "if you like to send to Heywood and Herbert, I've no doubt they will be able to tell

you, when they refer to their books, that they sold the brooch to me."

The curate chap was standing behind Mrs. Arbuthnot, and I heard him say to her in an aside that some of the others must have heard too :

"It might be well to make the inquiry. If there have been—er—passages between Miss Daventry and Mr. Vibart, we must remember his evidence is tainted. It would not be unnatural if he had—er—composed this statement to shield her."

Dash the fellow! Why didn't somebody wring his neck?

"Oh," Mrs. Arbuthnot said, looking more uncomfortable than before, "do be quiet! I—I—it isn't my brooch."

Lady Duncombe had been staring at Ella's bodice through a pair of long-handled glasses, but she put them down now and addressed Vibart.

"I don't think there is any necessity to send to Heywood and Herbert," she said placidly; "as it happens, I saw you buy that brooch. I was in the shop at the time, though you were too much absorbed to notice me. I made a note of it; for a brooch of that sort meant something special, and I watched for it all that season—for that and an announcement—without result. I don't think you need send to Heywood and Herbert."

On my word, I heard the curate at Mrs. Arbuthnot's back again.

"Even should this be true," he said, "where is your brooch? And why did she begin to wear this precisely when yours disappeared? Can it be she had lost that given to her by Mr. Vibart, and on hearing he was coming, took yours to replace it? Nothing can quite satisfactorily explain the circumstances but the discovery of *your* brooch."

"Yes, yes," said Mrs. Arbuthnot, in an agitated way; "I know. Do stop talking nonsense! Read that."

And she pushed the letter she held in her hand into mine. Why she gave it to me, I haven't a notion. I expect she was too confused at the moment to know who I was. However, I took it, and directly I had run my eyes over it, I stood up in the middle of the room, cleared my throat, and read it out as if I had been presenting an address or moving a vote of thanks.

"MY DEAREST GWEN,

"Your charming and almost too handsome present to darling baby arrived quite safely, although, you dear reckless thing, you had not registered the precious parcel. When I opened it, of course the lovely head-flannel—your *own* work, too, dear—came first to view. How good of you to make it. It suits darling baby sweetly. And then, in unfolding it, out came your cunning surprise—the present. What a godmother you are to send such an exquisite, costly brooch. Such a sweet idea, too, the hearts with an arrow, and, oh, those *lovely, lovely* diamonds. My darling little Gwendolen must always keep and prize this precious gift from her dear, generous godmother. So many, many thanks, dear, from

"Your loving friend,

"LAURA DUDLEY."

That letter made the whole thing as clear as daylight to four of us: Mrs. Arbuthnot, Ella, the curate, and myself. But, as the others looked a bit puzzled, I did some Greek chorus business, and explained how Mrs. Arbuthnot had been wearing the brooch when she finished the baby's flannel concern, and no doubt the ornament had been unfastened and dropped out into her work. Whereupon she must have rolled the one up inside the other and dispatched both to Mrs. Dudley. As to taking the brooch out of her dress and sticking it in the pincushion, she must have imagined that, as any one easily can of a thing they're in the habit of doing.

When I had finished, for the life of me I couldn't help turning to Mrs. Arbuthnot with a grin, and remarking:

"I'm afraid, after all, you *have* lost the brooch."

For I knew, after that letter, she wouldn't have the face to ask for it back again; and I thought it served her jolly well right for the way she had been letting people spatter Ella's good name. I only wished the curate had lost something too. But he has in a way; for Mrs. Arbuthnot is so ashamed of the business, and her and his share in it, that she puts it all on him and won't ask him near the place. She does her flirtations now with a chap on the comic papers; and as he is pretty stodgy too, he suits her down to the ground.

As for the rest, of course they all told Ella they'd never

believed a word of it, and congratulated her and Vibart effusively. I saw her "inconvenient sense of humour" nearly getting the better of her once or twice, but Vibart looked more like breaking some of their heads. He came and shook hands with me afterwards, and said something about how I had stuck by Ella. But, of course, I would do that.

And, as I explained, I don't say Ella in real life she being Mrs. Arthur Vibart. I am going down to stay with them this autumn.

Marie Mancini.

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.

By ROSA NIEDERHAUSER.

PLAIN women in fiction are ignored or forsaken ; in reality they occasionally conquer many hearts and cause great stir. Marie Mancini was exceptionally plain. They nicknamed her "the Blackamoor." Sallow, lean and lanky, there was no end to her arms and neck, her mouth was wide and flat, her black eyes were hard, her whole person lacked charm, and her mind matched the rest. She was one of the ten nieces and nephews imported into France by Cardinal Mazarin. The wily prime minister of Louis XIII., after that monarch's death, shared the power with Queen Anne of Austria, whom he had completely bewitched. Handsome, intelligent, keen-witted, he possessed all the qualities and charms of the Italian race, but also its faults. He attracted irresistibly, yet he was despicable and despised, but forgot insults and benefits alike, provided he could satisfy his greed for gold. The first contingent of his young relatives reached France on September the 11th, 1647, on the eve of the civil wars of the Fronde. They were three girls and a boy, fetched from Rome by one duchess, placed under the care of another, and educated with Queen Anne's own children. They bore obscure names—Mancini and Martinozzi—but Mazarin was their uncle. With the exception of Marie they were a strikingly handsome family, and all played conspicuous *rôles*. The girls were highly cultured, artistic, and transcendently fascinating. No French *grande dame* could rival a Mancini in the art of dressing, conversing and receiving, or combine so much dignity and grace when occasion demanded it. Bold and venturesome, these Italian sirens never aspired to heroism. They were adventuresses, who knew neither shame nor downheartedness. They looked upon every defeat as a mislucked trick and began afresh. Life, they pretended, was a game of hazard at which fools alone did not cheat, and whose stakes were pleasures, especially forbidden pleasures, most savoury of all.

Marie Mancini differed from the rest of her family in looks only. Amongst her lovely sisters she resembled a savage, bristling animal, always ready to bite. Her mother's dying wish was to have her cloistered, to avoid the calamities which, according to her father's prophecy, she was to bring about. Mazarin, though not free from superstition, disbelieved his brother-in-law and kept Marie at court, where she made good use of her time. She read, studied, and polished her mind in the refined society she frequented. She was eighteen or nineteen when Louis XIV. fell seriously ill and was at death's door. Marie's ardent southern nature disdained etiquette and conventionality. She was fond of the young king, and not ashamed of betraying her passion, alarmed the whole court by her heartrending sobs. At his unexpected recovery every one told him of Marie's extraordinary grief. He was not then the *grand monarque*, adulated like a divinity, but a mere youth, who blushed and paled easily, and trembled when a pretty damsel pressed his hand. The thought of having excited a grand passion flattered him exceedingly. He looked at Marie Mancini more carefully and found she had vastly improved. Indeed, there was something about her personality that enveloped, inflamed and devoured those that came too near. Louis talked to her, and the passionate accents of her thrilling voice carried him away like a straw in a storm. His calf love soon ripened into a deeper, stronger feeling. Majestic and graceful, clever in all manner of bodily exercises, Mazarin, intentionally, had kept him profoundly ignorant. Nor did he belong to those who guess and assimilate. His thoughts needed stimulating, and though already possessing the germs of the qualities which made him a great king, these, so far, had lacked air and light. Marie Mancini became his friend and adviser. She revealed to him noble and tender feelings and all that makes life worth living. She blamed his ignorance and encouraged him to seek the society of cultured, superior men. She instilled into him nobler ambitions than the choice of his costumes or the mastering of a new minuet step. She reminded him that he was a king and incited him to become a great king. Louis XIV. never forgot that lesson. Tenderness, gratitude, admiration and submissiveness, the trust of the pupil towards his master, combined with that special attraction exercised by the southern woman upon the man of the north, fairly promised

to become real and lasting love. With the cleverness characteristic of her race and family, Marie adroitly fanned the king's flame. She rendered herself indispensable. At the palace she was his shadow, whilst he had eyes for her alone. If the court travelled, Marie left the coach and crossed hills and dales on horseback, her troubadour by her side. For them there was neither winter nor summer, rain, wind nor cold. They were together, that was enough; it was everything. Mistress of the king's heart and mind, it was natural that the ambitious Italian should want to share his throne. Only, to gain her object she must have persuaded her uncle that his power would always remain what it then was, unlimited. Unfortunately for her cause, Marie was too impetuous and passionate to be diplomatic. What she had set her mind to, must happen at all costs—she knew no obstacles! So far, however, her conduct towards her uncle had given him no grounds for suspecting her submissiveness; and as long as his own interests did not suffer, he was quite agreeable to receive Louis XIV. into his family! One other person, however, generally tractable enough in his deft hands, threatened to prevent such an alliance—the king's mother, the proud Anne of Austria. Whenever he hinted at this possibility she suddenly drew herself up and treated her favourite and prime minister like the lowest of menials. To avert her suspicions, the crafty Italian suggested another bride, Margaret of Savoy, and negotiations to that effect were forthwith begun. If the match came off, the future Queen of France was a cousin of his niece Olympia, therefore still in the family. Marie was alarmed, but her spirits rose with the danger. An interview between the bride and bridegroom elect and their respective mammas was to take place at Lyons. Mdle. Mancini was of the party, riding, as usual, beside her royal lover nearly all the distance from Paris to Lyons. In the evening, like all lovers, they needed several hours to exchange their confidences. At Lyons, however, she was left at home, whilst the king, his mother and their suite went to meet Margaret and her party on the road.

"The princess," relates an eye-witness, "appeared in all her hopeless ugliness, which offended all eyes except those most interested—the young king's. Away from Marie's fascination, the passionate lover was suddenly a modest young man easily

pleased with his *fiancée* because he was very desirous to get married. He mounted into her coach and the two chatted quite familiarly as if they had known each other all their lives. Marie had been impatiently watching for the return of the coaches. She was not delighted by what she learnt of the interview, but her mind was promptly made up. Resigned and tearful she was lost. She was bold and jealous, made a violent scene that very night, accusing the king of fickleness, taunting him with his ridiculous choice of a hunchback, storming, pleading, mocking. Next day the Savoy bride was so completely ignored that the match was forthwith broken off and Marie and Louis resumed their idyl.

During the ensuing months they were scarcely an hour separated from morning till night. The court was the scene of perpetual *fêtes*, to which only young and loving couples were invited. Sailing with the wind, the young courtiers surrounded their future queen with honours. Mazarin, in a long interview with his niece, gathered that with his aid the crown was within her reach. Evidently his course was clear; one serious obstacle only was in the way—the dowager queen's hostility. He resolved to speak plainly of the impending marriage, trusting to his influence over her to get her consent. He was mistaken. Instead of falling in with his views, she informed him that she could not believe the king, her son, capable of such disgraceful weakness; but if he should think of it, all France would rise against him and the cardinal, and she herself would head the rebellion. Mazarin dissembled his wrath at these insulting words, intending to make her smart for them later on, and pretended to share her views. All the while he still meant to support Marie's pretensions, but she misinterpreted his diplomacy, and, believing herself abandoned, resolved to play her game single-handed. She began to ridicule her uncle on every possible occasion—to the young king's great delight—and Mazarin soon wondered whether the day of his niece's coronation might not be that of his own disgrace. Between the sacrifice of Marie's interests and his own the prime minister had not a minute's hesitation. To the queen's joyful surprise he suddenly turned round completely and voted for a Spanish marriage, upon which she had long set her heart.

Marie Mancini was not easily daunted. Too impetuous for intriguing, she meant to win by insolence. She defied the queen

to her face, followed Louis about more than ever, even into his mother's apartments, acquainted him with all the evil reports current about her, and actually succeeded in rendering undutiful this most respectful of sons! Her complete mastery over him almost leads one to suppose that she understood the modern science of suggestion. Yet it has been remarked that Louis XIV. was too selfish ever to have truly loved, and that Marie's heart, if she possessed one, was lodged in her head. Whether their love was genuine or not, they believed in it for a whole year, and declared themselves ready to die for it! But Mazarin's steady diplomacy proved stronger than that love. Whilst they daily renewed eternal vows, the Spanish match was quietly being settled, and when all was ready Mdlle. Mancini received orders to retire to the Castle of Brouage, near La Rochelle. The king, closeted with his mother, heard the news calmly enough, though he shed some tears. Only when he witnessed Marie's sombre despair, her bitter grief and reproaches, did he also grow desperate. Hastening to the queen and cardinal he declared that he would not, could not give her up, and on his knees begged their consent to his marriage. Mazarin, however, solemnly declared that rather than allow it he would stab his niece with his own hand. The king shed more tears and renewed his promises to Marie whilst accompanying her to her travelling coach. Her well-chosen parting words have often been quoted. "Sire," she said, "you are king and you love me, yet you suffer my departure." Marie's fierce despair even moved the cardinal, who with all his faults was not a hard man. "She suffers more than I can tell you," he wrote to the queen, and her own memoirs, written years after, confirm the statement. Still hoping, she tried a ruse. When her uncle visited her she pretended resignation to her fate and requested only to be allowed to correspond with her royal adorer. The permission was granted, and shoals of letters were exchanged. Louis XIV. was accused of wasting more time in writing to her than formerly in conversing. At the same time Marie addressed the most loving missives to her uncle, who gave her plainly to understand that he knew what to make of her sentiments. The crafty Italian was not the man to be taken in by a mere girl! To Louis XIV. he wrote that only mad infatuation could blind him, and wound up a most unflattering portrait of his niece by intimating that should the king persist in his

foolish and wicked plan, Mazarin meant to resign office and retire to Italy. The reply to his eighteen pages was short but significant. He might please himself about going away, as plenty of others would willingly take his post. Mazarin must have regretted his soft-heartedness in allowing the lovers to correspond! The court watched events with the greatest excitement, divided between horror of such an alliance and joy at the anticipated dismissal of the hated cardinal. The country echoed those feelings; Europe laughed, with the exception of Spain, which of course felt insulted on behalf of the Infanta. Frightened by the king's attitude, Mazarin again changed his tactics. He assured Louis XIV. that his wishes were law to him, and that he never dreamt of questioning anything he might find it his pleasure to do. Marie's chance was not lost after all, had she not suddenly surprised the world by a veritable *coup de théâtre*.

Believing the Spanish match a foregone conclusion, she resolved to retire gracefully by informing her uncle that she gave up all idea of becoming Queen of France. Having taken the decisive step, Marie felt relieved, and soon discovered that the undying passion so reluctantly renounced, had already burnt itself out. The overjoyed Mazarin expressed his satisfaction in letters overflowing with admiration and tender solicitude for his charming niece, and, still better, trebled her pension, which of late had been far from liberal. He saw her supplied with plenty of amusements and luxuries, including a sumptuous table, to which he was himself very partial. He also promised to find her a suitable *parti*, and, meanwhile, advised her to seek strength and consolation in Seneca. Marie Mancini needed no such anodynes. Her lonely heart did not long remain untenanted. All the stormy passion bestowed upon the king was forthwith transferred to Prince Charles of Lorraine. She took heaven and earth to witness that she would be married to him or become a nun!

Louis XIV., deeply hurt at her sudden renunciation of him, married the Infanta Maria Theresa on June 6th, 1660, six months after he and Marie had vowed eternal fidelity. On his return journey from Spain he piously visited Brouage, where she had suffered so much for love of him. On reaching Fontainebleau he heard that she, whom he still believed dissolved in tears, was devoured by a second burning passion. The most ordinary mortal resents being replaced; how much more a king, and most

of all the grand monarch. No wonder that, when Marie at her uncle's command went to make her courtesy to the new queen, her reception was decidedly cold!

In a private conversation Louis XIV. had even the cruelty to extol the virtues and charms of his young consort. "After that," remarks Marie in her memoirs, "I resolved to cease my complaints and to stifle all feeling." Things were going wrong with her now. Mazarin, since the king's marriage, had forgotten all his fine promises and refused his consent to her union with Charles of Lorraine, who soon took his love elsewhere, so that she was now bemoaning the loss of two suitors at once. The following year her uncle died, after having previously distributed his enormous wealth amongst his family, who are said to have shown their sorrow by exclaiming: "At last he is gone!"

Soon after Louis XIV. ordered Mdlle. Mancini to marry Connétable Colonna, a hitherto disdained admirer, and as he was settled in Italy she was sent to join him, being thus literally expelled from France! She relates that she managed to conceal her wounded pride until the first night after leaving Paris, when she completely broke down.

Mdme. Colonna did not fancy her husband, but bewitched, like all her admirers, he put up with her sulks, provided fairylike entertainments, spoilt, petted her and studied all her whims until he won her good graces, quite suddenly, just when he was beginning to despair.

The first few years of their married life resembled the ending of a fairy tale. They lived happily and had many children, with this difference only, that at the fifth child Madame la Connétable declared herself tired of family joys and began an adventurous and nomadic career. Unable to tire by her pranks the inexhaustible indulgence of an infatuated husband, she resolved upon flight. One fine morning she and her sister Hortense, likewise weary of conjugal fetters, drove out of Rome concealing manly apparel under their ordinary dress. At Civita Vecchia they dismissed their carriages and waited twenty-four hours, hiding in a wood without food or covering, for the boat they had ordered. At last it came, but the crew, suspecting an escapade, extorted enormous sums from the ladies, threatening to upset the *felucca* if their demands were not immediately satisfied. After running untold risks from tempests and pirates, and constantly expecting

to be overtaken by their husbands, they reached Marseilles, where they had only rested one hour at a miserable inn, when, to escape the much-dreaded pursuit, they had to "move on." They roamed about the south of France for a considerable time, deprived of the most essential necessities, reduced to begging.

Hortense grew tired of their hardships and returned to her husband, the Duke of Mazarin, whilst Marie pursued her journey to Paris, determined to see the king once more, perhaps—who knows?—to add a sequel to her romance. The Parisians, ever eager for excitement, curiously awaited her advent. How would Louis XIV. receive his old flame? He made it a practice to show gratitude to the women who had loved him, but etiquette and decorum ruled his court now, and Marie, always unconventional, had become a regular Bohemian. Besides, she had so soon consoled herself, and many of his courtiers still remembered his red eyes when Mazarin refused to let him marry his niece. To her letter soliciting the favour of settling in Paris he coldly answered that on the contrary he advised her to retire into a convent to stop the gossip started by her flight from Rome. Nevertheless she drove post haste to Fontainebleau, where one of Louis XIV.'s chamberlains found her in a humble tavern. He informed her that unless she wished to enter a convent at Grenoble it was the king's desire she should immediately leave the country. She tartly replied that she had not quitted her home to return to it so soon. Her reasons for coming away were of a private nature and could be revealed to his Majesty alone, whose directions she would now await, seeing that she had no mind to go to a nunnery, either at Grenoble or elsewhere. Then anticipating a lecture from the courtier, she took up a guitar and played several airs ere her baffled visitor left her. She was quite capable, in spite of strict orders, to take the king unawares. To avoid such a scandal, another message, still more peremptory, consigned her to a convent at Reims. She offered to go if only the favour was granted to her of seeing his Majesty once more face to face! But times were changed, for Mdme. Colonna went to Reims without having been admitted into the king's presence. "I was disappointed in my expectations," she wrote, "and the king, from whom I hoped everything, treated me very coldly, for reasons still unknown."

At Reims she seems to have taken a fancy to convent life; at

all events, she visited many in various countries, turning up as a rule where she was least expected. In January, 1680, she appears at Madrid, where she claims the protection of the French ambassador, M. de Villars, against her still doting husband. She has not given up her hope of fascinating anew her royal lover, upon whom Madame de Maintenon now keeps a watchful eye! So far from being admitted at court Madame Colonna is forbidden to cross the French frontiers. Her irrelevant conduct at the convents made her anything but a welcome guest. She disturbed the nuns' devotions by chasing dogs round the dormitories, put ink in the holy water basin, occasionally bribed the nun who attended the turning box and, accompanied by a maid, took a nocturnal walk on the Prado, conspicuously attired. In the daytime she received her various admirers in the parlour, including her husband, who continued to implore her to return to him. Contrary to most women she had grown good-looking with advancing years. Her complexion had cleared up, her figure filled out, her brilliant eyes become soft and appealing, hair and teeth were well preserved.

Weary of roaming she bursts in upon her husband one fine morning. He, overjoyed to get her back, intimates his intention of keeping his linnet caged now. Such is not Madame Colonna's idea, however. Terrible scenes ensue, which set all Madrid talking. The king, queen, their ministers, and even the grand inquisitor 'interfere. At his wits' end, the Connétable orders her formal arrest by men-at-arms, who unceremoniously drag her to prison by the hair and half naked. He now promises to enter the Holy Order of the Knights of Malta on condition that she shall become a nun. And, behold, on a certain Saturday morning she takes the veil of a novice in a convent of Madrid. The costume is becoming, the nunnery comfortable and not strict. Besides, Madame Colonna is a woman of resources. Underneath her garb she wears brocaded skirts, and no sooner out of sight than she throws off the first, dresses her hair *à l'espagnole*, with a high comb and coloured ribbons, and parades about for her own gratification. Impossible for any one to believe in her vocation. Her husband himself sees the folly of his suggestion, and at last leaves her for good and all! Small blame to him, though it would have been more magnanimous to provide for her than to leave her to poverty in a garret without fire—in

need of everything. Probably he regretted his cruelty, for at his death, in 1688, he not alone left her his fortune, but asked her forgiveness, and to exonerate her in the eyes of her children, took upon himself the blame of her erratic conduct.

Once more she led a joyous existence, her coquetry increasing with years. In 1705 she appeared in France for the last time, still intending to see the king, but always prevented. For several months she was not allowed to advance further than Provence; finally, her banishment was limited to Paris. She came even to Passy, but found that she had grown estranged from the society she once loved. Her former friends neglected her, and her own family had dispersed or died.

Finally Madame Colonna disappeared from the scene and plunged into the darkness of oblivion. The date of her death is uncertain, but she is supposed to have lived till 1715. She had become more and more absorbed in occult science, cultivated by most members of her strange family. One pictures her old, wizened and dishevelled, her eyes alone still sparkling. She shuffles the cards, trying to read the future. Alas, there is no future for her now! But there is the past to remember, the brilliant past when she stood on the verge of becoming Queen of France!

This Transitory Life.

By THOROLD DICKSON and M. PECHELL.

CHAPTER VII.

"A heritage of woe."

ONCE more in the Eternal City.

Throughout the railway journey from Brindisi to Rome, the image of Margaret Trent had haunted Straight's mind ; he had tried reading, but soon gave up the effort ; her face seemed to come between him and the print. Was ever man so unfortunate as he ? He had met the one woman he could love on this earth, but it was too late. A great gulf lay between them.

Then he fell to picturing what his life might have been with Margaret as his wife : the admiration she would cause, the way in which she would help him in his career.

The carriage stopped before the house in the Via Condotti, and Douglas ran upstairs and vented his feelings in a ring which nearly pulled the bell-wires down.

The door was opened by Francesca, Alice's maid, who laid her finger on her lips.

"Would the signor go gently, the signora had one of her bad headaches."

Straight was not in a frame of mind, however, to listen to anything. He pushed past the girl into his wife's room. She was lying apparently insensible on the bed. Douglas looked at her and then went closer and shook her ; a peculiar smell was perceptible ; he shook her again more roughly and something rolled from the bed and fell with a crash on the floor. It was a liqueur bottle.

Leaving his wife, Straight went into the *salon* and, sitting down, reflected long and deeply. Then he wrote a note to an old friend of his, a doctor, who lived in Rome, though he had long given up practice.

"What can I do for you, my boy?" said Dr. Ellis, when he arrived an hour later.

Having known Douglas from his birth he could never quite realize the fact that he had reached man's estate.

"Fact is, I'm in trouble—about my wife."

"Ah!" and in that one syllable the doctor expressed volumes.

"You're the oldest friend I've got, so I asked you to come. I daresay you know that it hasn't been quite plain sailing between Alice and me since we've been here."

"I have noticed it. Sorry—very sorry. I've often called round since you have been away to have a look at your wife, but she has always been too unwell to see me. Is she ill to-day?" he added, with a quick glance at Straight.

"That is just what I want to consult you about. Come and see," and he took the doctor into Alice's room.

One glance at the prostrate form on the bed and the broken bottle on the floor and the old man shook his head.

"Douglas, I am very sorry for you; a sad case, a very sad case. I have suspected it for some weeks. You ought not to have left her alone, exposed to temptation."

"How on earth was I to know that she had any leanings that way? D——n it," he exclaimed with a sudden burst of anger. 'It was an evil day when I first saw her pretty, silly face. She has been a curse to me ever since.'

"Gently, my boy. You should have more pity for the poor girl. Remember she is your wife."

"Yes, she *is* my wife," said Straight bitterly, for he thought of Margaret.

"By all accounts," continued the doctor, "you have not made her life here the happiest. It has become quite a saying that you two are never seen together."

"Hang it all! what can a fellow do? She hates the life here, and won't try to get on with the people. Isn't that hard enough for a man in my position? And now to find out that she drinks! I shall have to chuck the Foreign Office."

"Don't do anything hastily. You musn't be despairing. We must hope for the best. If it isn't hereditary there is always hope. By the way, do you know much about her people?"

"Nothing, absolutely nothing. She was living alone with an

idiotic old mother when I met her, and she once mentioned a brother, about whom there appears to be some mystery."

"Well, take my advice: leave Rome as soon as possible. Go to England; let your wife have a thorough change of air and surroundings. I'll send you something to give her, and when you are in London you might consult Sir Edward Nettleby. He makes these cases his speciality. Good-bye, and don't forget one thing—be kind to her."

CHAPTER VIII.

"It biteth like a serpent."

Prov. xxiii. 32.

"DIPLOMATIC society doesn't seem to have improved your wife much. Lost her looks, too," remarked Valencia Straight, looking after Alice's retreating form.

Douglas and his sister were sitting under the trees at Harborough House. It was September, and he and his wife had been in England for some months.

"I don't understand her either," continued Valencia; "she doesn't seem to take the least interest in anything. I've tried her on all sorts of subjects, but it's impossible to get her to rise to any of them. Everybody ought to have a hobby of some sort. By the way, I don't like that new gun of mine. You can have it for a song. Why don't you teach Alice to shoot?"

Valencia was a keen sportswoman.

Straight muttered something unintelligible and followed his wife into the house.

Alice seemed in a great measure to have checked her unfortunate failing since they had been in England, and her husband began to think that she was on the high road to recovery, though it must be owned that he did not take very active steps to prevent opportunities of her indulging. During the last few days she had appeared nervous and out of sorts.

Straight opened his wife's door gently and went in. She was standing with her back to him taking something out of her dressing case. He came up and snatched the object from her hands. It was a long cut-glass smelling bottle.

"Give me my scent bottle," exclaimed Alice, trying to take it

from him ; but he held it high above her head while he unscrewed the silver stopper. It was full of brandy.

A feeling of utter loathing and disgust came over him.

"How long have you gone on in this way," he asked, "hiding spirits in your dressing case?"

"Oh! Douglas, please don't hate me. I can't help it." And sitting down on the ground she sobbed bitterly. "I try, indeed I do, oh, so hard ; but you are so cold and indifferent to me, and when you say something unkind I feel I must take something ; it helps me to forget."

"Well, you had better go back to your mother. You are not fit to be in society."

"Please don't send me away. I shall die if you do." And she clasped her hands about him. "Take me to a doctor ; he will give me something to take the craving away. Oh, I *will* conquer it if you will only give me one more chance. For God's sake, be kind to me, Douglas ! If you send me away I shall kill myself."

The next day Straight took his wife up to town to see Sir Edward Nettleby.

The exact views of that celebrated physician upon the case were involved in some obscurity.

"I am sorry to say, Mr. Straight, that your wife's case is a sad one, a *very* sad one. But mind, I do not say hopeless. While there is life there is hope," and the great man uttered this axiom, with which men of his profession deceive us, buoying us up with false hopes, as if it had been the latest discovery of science.

"Mrs. Straight confided to me," he continued, "that alcoholism is unfortunately hereditary in her family ; her only brother has been in an establishment for dipsomaniacs for years."

"What on earth am I to do?" exclaimed Douglas. "I can't take her back to Rome with me, and I am due there next week."

"Your wife is also, I am sorry to tell you, in a very delicate state of health ; I have found on examination deep-seated organic mischief, which eventually must prove fatal ; however, with proper care she will, I hope, live for many years. She is so deeply attached to you, that although in these cases I generally recommend special treatment in an establishment, yet I feel a forced separation would bring about serious results—I may say *most* serious. Take your wife with you to Rome ; on no account

leave her behind. I have prescribed a course of treatment which I hope will be successful. I have also recommended a companion to Mrs. Straight: a most charming lady, who has had great experience in these cases; and as long as she touches no alcohol——”

“But if she should manage to get hold of any?”

“My dear Mr. Straight, do not let us anticipate evil; still, in answer to your question, I feel it my duty to warn you that any prolonged relapse in alcoholism on the part of your wife would be attended with serious results—I may say *most* serious.”

“Which being interpreted,” said Douglas to himself, “means that unless Alice is forcibly kept from liquor she will drink herself to death,” and he pondered on the doctor’s sayings.

So it was arranged that Alice should return to Rome with her husband, accompanied by Miss Webb, a lady of uncertain age and aggressive views upon “Justification by Faith.”

The evening before they started, Straight, at his wife’s request, took her to see “A Woman’s Scorn,” at the Corsican; it reminded her of old times, she said.

The house was nearly empty, people being out of town, and Douglas, who was not a little bored—he hated melodrama—buried himself in a newspaper.

During the first interval there was a stir amongst the audience, and glasses were directed to the box exactly opposite theirs.

“I wonder who that is,” said Alice. “What magnificent diamonds. Do look!”

Straight put down his paper and looked. The tall figure taking off her cloak seemed familiar, and when she turned round a thrill went through him, and he uttered an exclamation of delight as he recognized Margaret Trent.

CHAPTER IX.

“Of all the paths that lead to a woman’s love, pity’s the straightest.”

The Knight of Malta.

“KISMET,” remarked Straight, throwing down the *Morning Post*.

Alice picked it up, and looking down the court and society news, read: “We understand that Mr. J. Primrose Trent, the

Australian millionaire, and Mrs. J. Primrose Trent have left London for Paris, *en route* for Rome, where they intend passing the season."

"Those people we saw at the theatre just before we left England?" she said.

"Yes, my dear; and I request you will call upon them as soon as they arrive."

Something in Straight's tone made Alice look up quickly, it seemed to convey a covert sneer, but he was intent on rolling a cigarette.

"I have heard that Mrs. Trent is a singularly beautiful and accomplished woman," put in Miss Webb discreetly.

"Singularly enough your information coincides with what I have heard," replied Straight, and his cigarette being finished, he rose, lighted it, and left the room.

Alice looked after him for a minute, her lips trembling and her eyes full of tears.

"Miss Webb," she exclaimed at last, "my life is miserable; it's no good trying any more. Douglas hates me, and I am only a burden to him. He loves that woman. Oh, yes; he thinks I am blind and stupid and don't see it. But I do. I know he met her in India, and he is always looking at her photo, and he wrote to her after we saw them in London. And now she is coming here. I wish I was dead."

"Don't upset yourself, dear Mrs. Straight. We know that man's heart is desperately wicked, and we are told to set our affections upon nothing on this earth. A little *sal volatile* will do you good. You must not make yourself ill."

"Ill! I wish I was dying! Perhaps then Douglas would be kind to me, when he knew he was going to be free."

"My dear, I wish I could see you in a different frame of mind. Providence sends trials to convert us. I will read you a passage from 'Warnings to the Unregenerate.'"

"I don't want to be converted. I want Douglas to love me again. Oh, you don't know what it is to lose your husband's love. You have never been married."

And Miss Webb thanked a benevolent Providence that had withheld from her the snare of beauty, and had further endowed her with strength of mind to refuse the only offer she had ever had. Said offer being made by an aged invalid, whose gout she

had nursed, and who consoled himself a week later by marrying his cook.

Meanwhile Straight strolled idly along the streets and reasoned within himself. "Fate! It is too strong for me; why struggle against it? After all, Moncrieff was right; to every man it is given to attain his desires: why should a woman ruin one's whole life? Alice has ruined mine; had she been different—but what's the good of speculating? she will drink to the end of the chapter. That old woman says that when the craving comes on she can hardly keep her from it, and yet our beneficent and Christian laws bind me to the poor wretch, to love, honour and cherish her as long as life lasts."

Just then a party of German students, who had been refreshing themselves in a wine shop, came out arm-in-arm, joyously shouting, "*Freut euch des Lebens.*"

"After all," thought Straight, "the Epicureans were right—'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.'"

In a week's time the Trents arrived and took up their abode in a luxurious flat in the Via Nazionale. The Straights were their first visitors. Douglas exerted himself in a most unusual way to do the honours of the city, and to get up expeditions, pic-nics, &c., for Margaret's amusement. John Trent was pleased to see his wife interested and entertained; he himself was much occupied in some mysterious business connected with wool and tinned mutton.

In spite of Miss Webb's vigilance, poor Alice had frequent relapses, for in some inexplicable way she seemed to manage to obtain liquor, and had even been known to have recourse to eau-de-Cologne when other supplies were cut off.

The state of things gradually came to be understood in society, and Douglas was very much pitied.

"Mrs. Straight does not care about going out," said Mrs. Trent one day, as she and Douglas were standing side by side on the Palatine. She said it in all good faith, as the real cause of Alice's frequent indisposition had not reached her ears.

Straight gave her a look.

"Mrs. Trent," he said, "have you ever done anything in this life of which you repent?"

No quick-witted woman could mistake the meaning apparent

in his tone and eyes, neither did Margaret, but she attempted to turn it off lightly.

"Oh, I suppose we all should like to have our lives over again and live them differently, but I don't suppose if we did we should be any more content."

"Perhaps you don't know it, though every one else in the place does: my unfortunate wife is addicted to alcohol and—well, perhaps you can imagine what my life is."

Margaret was silent for some minutes, and busily occupied herself in rooting up a tiny maidenhair from a crevice in the stones. At last she spoke.

"What is the good of my saying anything, Mr. Straight? In cases like this words of sympathy seem useless. Were I to tell you that we all have our trials it would seem like a sermon, but you *know* I feel for you. My own life has not been all roses. Women envy me, my diamonds and my riches, but I would gladly give all I possess to be free. In the old days, I often felt the sting of poverty, but I was far happier then."

"Happiness! Yes, it is what every one longs for. It is withheld from us until just too late; and then an ironical fate holds up a picture of 'what might have been' to us."

"Is one ever happy? It is a condition that is always in the future: blue roses, which appear in our dreams; we smell the perfume, we stretch out our hands to pick them—and we wake."

"Then you think we are creatures of circumstance, and have to endure what the gods send us?"

"I don't quite know what I think. But one thing seems pretty clear, and that is our duty. We have to do that, and not think about ideals and what might have been."

"And sacrifice one's youth, life, prospects, love, anything and everything that makes life worth living to a fetish called duty! For devout people who look upon this earth as a vale of tears, and expect a substantial future reward for their virtues, that may do! But for us! Have any really great people ever allowed themselves to be bound down by such miserably conventional rules? Where would French literature have been if Georges Sand had remained a slave to her drunken husband? Who is there, except your ultra-pious folk, who blame George Eliot's union with Lewes? Margaret," and Straight seized her hand "you know, you can't be blind, how I love you. I have done

so ever since the first day we met. I believe you care for me a little. I daresay I have been a selfish, good-for-nothing fellow, but for your sake I could do anything. Your life is as miserable as mine. What sort of affection or respect can bind me to my wretched wife? In a few years she will have drunk herself to death. For God's sake, Margaret, don't let such things stand in the way of our happiness."

Mrs. Trent drew her hand away. "I wonder," she said quietly, "if you know what you are asking? Suppose I were to consent to leave my husband for you, what would be the consequence? You would have to give up your appointment; your future career would be ruined."

"That!" exclaimed Douglas quickly. "Do you think there is anything in the world I would not give up gladly for your sake? We would leave this hard-working, dreary world and find some place where, away from every one, we would live for each other."

"And how long do you suppose that would last?" she asked. "A home in some Greek island might be a paradise for a few weeks, but after? You would regret your lost position in the world, the aims and future you had cast away. Life would become intolerable. I should see you tired of me, and unable to get rid of me, and my position would be worse. Douglas, believe me, I care too much about you to listen to your words. We both have our lives to go through and our duty to do; you to your wife, I to my husband. Let us forget to-day. I want a friend; be that to me, and let us put love out of the question."

"A friend! when I love you beyond everything else in the world!"

"Then I must never see you again."

"Anything but that. Margaret, I promise I will not say another word of love if you will only continue to let me see you. Otherwise life would be unbearable. But, all the same, it does seem a cruel thing that our happiness should be wrecked for the sake of that bugbear 'duty.'"

The sun had just disappeared behind a bank of clouds, and Mrs. Trent rose to go; turning to Straight with a faint smile, she said:

"Duty is hard, but, believe me, it is right. 'There may be

heaven, there must be hell ; in the meantime there is our life here. Well ? ’ ”

• • • • •

“ I call it a beastly shame,” said Harry Vernon. “ Straight leaves his wife alone to the tender mercies of that old Gorgon, Miss Webb, and is for ever dancing attendance on that Trent woman, and takes very good care to let every one know that he considers himself thrown away, misunderstood, &c.”

“ What will you ? ” remarked his companion, shrugging his shoulders. “ I have the greatest sympathy for poor Mrs. Straight, but she must be a great trial to her husband.”

“ Well, you may look at it in that light, but from the very first he always neglected her, and was always about with some one else, and if that isn’t enough to make anybody take to drink, I don’t know what is ! ”

This conversation took place in the smoking-room of the Embassy. A reception was in full swing, and Mrs. Trent’s beauty and diamonds were among the principal topics of conversation.

“ Seen the Australian this evening ? ” inquired a third man joining them. “ He looks like a bear with a sore head. What on earth do women like Mrs. Trent marry such cads for ? ”

“ Diamonds, that’s about the figure,” replied the first man. “ By Jove ! she is a ripper, though. If I were a beauty married to a creature like that, I’d—— ”

“ Straight’s a lucky fellow,” chimed in the last comer. “ Mrs. Trent is giving him a liberal education. Lucky in love, unlucky in marriage,” he continued. “ If I’d a wife given to tipling, I’d wring her neck.”

“ Look here, you fellows,” exclaimed Harry Vernon, who had been listening to these remarks with rising anger, “ Mrs. Straight happens to be a particular friend of mine. Talk about women being down on each other, men are ever so much worse.”

CHAPTER X.

"Trifles, light as air,
Are to the jealous confirmations strong
As proofs of holy writ."—*Othello*, Act iii., Sc. 3.

THE sun was streaming in at the Trents' rooms in the Via Nazionale, flooding the pretty breakfast table and the hundred and one rare objects that the rich Australian and his wife had gathered about them in the course of their wanderings. There were roses on the table and through the open window was wafted the delicate scent of the lilies and verbenas on the balcony.

It was a perfect morning early in April, when Italy is at its brightest and best ; but the grace and charm of his surroundings awakened no responsive echo in John Trent's heart. He sat opposite his wife's vacant chair at the breakfast-table, mechanically sorting out her letters from his. They had been up late the night before at the opera, and Margaret was still in her room. Presently he came to a note for her, which deepened the set expression of his face.

"How many times have I seen that writing within the last month?" he muttered to himself. Then he rose, poured out a cup of tea for his wife, gathered up her letters and took them in to her.

She was lying with half-closed eyes, looking, as Trent thought, very beautiful. He paused a moment to gaze on her. As Margaret turned her eyes on her husband a troubled expression filled them.

"Something has vexed you, John ; you don't look yourself. What is it?"

"Nothing, Margaret, nothing. The usual business worries and late hours," he added with a forced smile.

Putting down the tea and her letters, he kissed her. Then he went back to his solitary meal. Outside was the stir and bustle of the city, the hawkers with their quaint cries, the happy-go-lucky drivers cracking their whips, the flower-girls vending their fragrant bouquets. John Trent left the table and looked out.

The shops were bright with Easter wares, the pavements thronged with a happy careless crowd ; the air full of laughter and echoing quip and jest in the soft Roman speech. John Trent saw and heard none of these things.

His thoughts were far away in one of the hot stifling streets of a great Australian town, in the house where he first met his wife.

He had been successful in his wooing, as in most other undertakings of his life. The man of small beginnings, who had become by hard toil and sagacious enterprise the owner of thousands, had crowned his life with a marriage a king might envy. So he thought then, and now it was to him but gall and bitterness. It had come upon him gradually, as such things do. Looking back upon it all he could not blame his wife. The young and penniless governess had been frank with him. She liked and respected him, of love she could not speak. She had even hinted at some early attachment that had ended sadly. But the rough bush squatter was content, more than content. He married her, and lavished on his young wife all that wealth could give. If he never won her love he enjoyed at least the companionship of a singularly sweet and gentle nature, and until the last few months his happiness was practically undisturbed. He was not a man of nerves and emotions. He was rich and successful and had a beautiful wife. That was enough. But now this man had come between them—this Douglas Straight—a man of her own class, sharing her tastes, feelings and aspirations. There was a common bond of sympathy between them that he had never shared with his wife, and never would.

Straight's own wretched wife was a curse and a clog on him. He and Margaret Trent had become inseparable. It was the talk, in a polite *sotto voce*, of Rome. Trent was the last to realize the facts, as is the rule with those in his position. His old uncanny suspicions had passed away in the whirl of business and travel. At last his eyes were opened.

Some days before there had been a luncheon party at the Straights', at which Trent and wife were present. A little music and singing followed. Douglas Straight, who had a voice above the average, was induced to sing. He chose the whimsical little

ditty, "*Conosci tu il paese?*" and had just finished the second verse :

"Dost know that land beatic,
That kens no priestly chatter,
Nor ritual erratic,
Nor poetaster's patter?
Where rise no prisons loathèd,
Where blooms no soldier's laurel,
And where the new-betrothèd
Ne'er have a lovers' quarrel."

The half-mocking words had barely died away when Mrs. Straight rose and, choking down a hysterical sob, left the room. Straight merely followed her with his eyes—a hard, cruel light in them. Recovering himself, he made some formal excuse for his wife's indisposition, and stooped over Margaret to recover his music. Trent happened to turn his eyes from the door to the piano as Straight did so. He noticed that Margaret's face was turned upwards with a look full of pity on it, and that as Douglas Straight bent forward he nearly touched her forehead with his lips.

The party soon broke up and Trent sought an explanation from his wife. He knew her loyal nature too well to discredit her statements, and he made her no reproaches; but he never forgot that scene, and he felt that the light of his life had been clouded over for ever. Telling Margaret that he was going out on business and would not be back to lunch, he now went to the bank, and after calling at several places of business, finished the day by writing letters.

In the evening they went to the theatre with Douglas Straight and Lady Mary Lumley, a great friend of Mrs. Trent's, who good-naturedly completed the party in the absence of Mrs. Straight. The piece was "*Il Trovatore*," after which they adjourned to the *Caffé Roma*, where Straight was to give them supper.

The evening somehow dragged. Straight seemed hipped, Margaret ill at ease at dinner and at the theatre. Trent was silent and absent-minded. Even merry, rattling Lady Mary could not bring mirth to the party.

They were now sitting round the table, the two ladies sipping their coffee, Trent and Douglas smoking. Presently Trent hailed a passing waiter and ordered a brandy and soda. The man brought a liqueur bottle full of brandy and Trent helped himself.

Straight was sitting opposite to him, lolling back in his chair, his cigarette at such an angle between his teeth as almost to touch his nose. He was watching Trent, his eyes half-closed, an ill-concealed sneer on his face.

"Isn't that a rather stiff peg?" he drawled out.

The long tumbler was indeed one-third full of brandy.

"Perhaps it is," replied Trent, as he added a little soda. "Perhaps I have a stiff piece of work before me."

Then, looking across at his wife, he raised the glass and, with the words, "Your health and happiness," emptied it.

Lady Mary began talking rapidly to Margaret.

Murmuring something about "seeing after the carriage," Trent went out.

A couple of minutes later the report of a pistol was heard.

The supper party sprang to their feet and rushed out with one accord.

They found John Trent lying stone dead on the marble floor of the vestibule, with a bullet through his head.

CHAPTER XI.

"I only feel—Farewell!—Farewell!"—*Byron*.

It was a week after the tragedy, and Straight, who had not seen Margaret except at the inquest, and had purposely kept away from her, felt he could not do so much longer. John Trent's death had been sudden and dreadful, but the first shock over, Douglas put sentiment away and looked at the position as it affected himself.

In this world, at any rate, there is no such thing as disinterested affection; all love and all passion is pure selfishness; we love people in the degree that they minister to our wants, and Straight recognizing the force of this, rejoiced that one obstacle was removed from his path. By-and-bye, when the first shock was over, Margaret would listen to reason. She loved him, that was a great step in his favour, and she might at last be persuaded to come to him.

Alice was welcome to a divorce; he would supply her with necessary funds, and make her a liberal allowance for the future. He could then marry Margaret and begin life on a new basis. Things stood on quite a different footing now. There need be

no hurried flight and burying one's self and one's talents in some remote place. Public sympathy would be with him, and once married the past would be soon forgotten. True he would have to resign his appointment in the F. O., but that was inevitable in any case. Indeed, during the past few weeks it had been broadly hinted to him that his resignation would be eminently acceptable, and failing that, he might expect a transfer at no very distant date to the utmost limits of civilization.

What matter, though! He had attained the summit of his desires (so he thought), and it is not given to many to do that in this vale of tears. He was young, well off, and the world was all before him. With Margaret as his guiding star he would carve himself out a new career and forget the old life for ever.

Reasoning thus Straight wended his way to the house in the Via Nazionale. Intent on his thoughts he did not notice that the blinds were down, and the carefully-kept staircase had an untidy, deserted air.

An old woman answered his ring.

"Was the signora at home? What! did not the signor know? The signora had left Rome the day before."

"Left Rome? Margaret gone? Impossible! Gone without letting him know," and Straight muttered a curse.

"Yes, Signora Trent had gone, but she had left a letter to be given to Signor Straight in case he called," and the old woman hobbled away to fetch it.

After what seemed an eternity to Straight, she returned. He tore off the cover impatiently. The letter, which contained but a few lines, had no beginning.

"Do not attempt to follow me," he read; "all efforts to find me will be useless. We must never meet again. Indeed I ought to have left Rome long ago. Return to your wife. Be kind to her for she loves you. May the world go well with you, and forget the existence of—

"MARGARET TRENT."

Douglas read the few blotted words over and over again, and set his teeth as he did so. Was ever loser content with the loss of the game? Forget *her*! He would follow her to the ends of the earth and rouse heaven and hell to find her.

In order to set about this at once he went home. Alice was sitting in the *salon* as he went in. She was looking better than usual, a light in her eyes that had not been there for many days ; she had on her smartest dress, and her pretty fair hair piled about her head in the latest fashion, fresh from the hands of a celebrated hairdresser.

"Douglas, I'm so glad you have come back early. I want you to take me for a drive, and then——"

But Straight did not look at her.

"Where's Pietro?" he asked. "I'm going away at once."

"Away! What do you mean?"

"Yes, away. You'll find some money there," and he threw her his pocket-book. "You had better make arrangements to go to your mother. I will write in a day or two."

"Douglas! For heaven's sake what do you mean?" she cried, clasping his arm. "Why am I to go? Oh, I know I have not made you a good wife, but now it is different. You *were* unkind before, but now we will lead a new life. I will never, never touch any spirits again. I love you, Douglas, so much, and will do anything in the world for you—anything, Douglas."

But he shook her off roughly.

"Too late. Don't be a fool, Alice ; we must look things in the face. It is no good ; we can never live together again. Best go to your mother ; you shall have an ample allowance."

"Allowance! Money! In place of you, Douglas! Do please forgive me this once?"

But he only shook his head.

"Oh, I know now ; it is that woman you are going to. That woman who stole your love from me. How I hate her. And you want to go to her! She is a murderess, too ; she murdered her husband if any one ever did."

"Silence!" said Straight in a very low voice and seizing his wife's wrists. "If you dare to say another word against *her*!"

But misery had made Alice reckless.

"She is a liar, too. She promised me she would leave Rome and has not done so."

"What do you know about it?" exclaimed Douglas. "If you have driven away the only woman I ever loved, it will be the worse for you."

Alice instinctively put her hand in her pocket and Straight

seized it. There was a short struggle and he succeeded in wrenching a paper from it.

Alice covered her face with her hands and fell sobbing into a chair.

Straight opened what appeared to be the rough draft of a letter and read :

"MRS. TRENT,

"Before my husband saw your face I was a happy woman, and then you came between us and stole his love. Is it right? Is it generous? You, who have everything you want, everybody who sees you loves you. Could you not have found some one else and left Douglas alone? Your husband is dead, and they all say it was on account of your flirting he shot himself. If you have any feeling or any remorse you will go, and leave me my husband. Surely you have done mischief enough. If he never sees you again, he will forget you in time, and come back to his wife."

CHAPTER XII.

"Rest her soul."

Hamlet, Act v. Sc. i.

NEXT day Straight sent in his papers. There was only one alternative. He might have effected a transfer to some other embassy, for after the scandal of Trent's suicide, to remain in Rome became impossible. Wherever he might go, however, his wife's failing would render his social position untenable. The one consolation that might have induced him to face matters and live them down had now failed him. The one woman whom he could love had left him for ever. Douglas Straight decided to throw up his career and seek diversion and temporary oblivion in travel.

He briefly informed Alice of his decision, and consented to her earnest entreaty to be allowed to accompany him instead of returning to her mother.

Since the discovery of her letter to Mrs. Trent, she had been in a state of nervous collapse, and in her unexpected delight at being allowed to remain with her husband, ventured two other timid requests. One was that Miss Webb's further services

might be dispensed with. Straight with a grim smile at once assented. The lady's presence added no pleasure to that dreary *ménage*, and certain plans for his wife's future would, if anything, be advanced by her dismissal.

This was speedily effected, with a few words of polite explanation and a handsome cheque equivalent to three months' salary.

On the other hand, Alice tearfully clung to Francesca. The girl had, from the circumstances, become more her companion than her maid. Broken in body and mind, Alice shrank from the idea of saying farewell to the one creature who was uniformly kind and forbearing, and of facing a long journey alone with the husband who despised and hated her. Straight would have preferred to have engaged in London some new attendant ignorant of the secrets of his household, and Francesca's attachment to his wife was no special recommendation to him. Indeed he already felt a certain growing dislike to the girl, probably due to this cause.

Still, it was something to have about his wife a woman who knew her ways, and, whether from this consideration or from a faint semi-conscious echo of past tenderness, he told his wife that it should be as she desired.

No time was lost in winding up his affairs in Rome. The few farewell calls were soon paid, and within three days the party were on their way to London, *en route* for the West Indies.

Straight had telegraphed, securing berths on one of the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company's vessels, which was about to leave Liverpool on a three months' cruise.

His first step on going on board was to interview the ship's doctor, a very young Scotchman, neither better nor worse qualified than most men of his class, and with the advantage of a well-bred bearing and sympathetic manner. In a few words Straight explained the situation, laying some stress on the dictum of Sir Edward Nettleby in regard to the case. He hinted that he feared the vigilance insisted on by the great physician had in some mysterious way been eluded.

Dr. Macdonald looked grave and remarked that that was not altogether unknown in such cases. After seeing his patient he looked graver still; prescribed a sedative, and impressed upon Straight that his wife was, he feared, in a very precarious state.

The ship was now under way, and as they steamed down the Mersey, the contrast between the voyage on which he was now setting out and that on which he met Margaret Trent rose to his mind.

How bright and full of sunshine had been that time with her ; how sympathetic, how gentle, how beautiful she was. And he was sailing away from her now with this miserable incubus upon him. Only to be free, and he would search all the world until he found the one being on earth that could make his life complete.

The voyage proceeded on its dull and irksome course. Never, Straight thought, had so many common-place people been cooped up together on board a ship. He took no notice of any one, which, under the circumstances, excited no remark ; and if it had, Douglas Straight was the last person in the world to care one way or the other. He spent his time in reading or pretending to read—for his thoughts were elsewhere—and in smoking innumerable cigarettes.

One day the doctor drew him quietly aside.

" Had Mr. Straight any suspicions of the Italian maid ? "

" In what possible way ? "

The doctor explained. He had himself issued the very strictest orders, and though stewards and stewardesses are human, and therefore venial, he believed in this case his injunctions regarding liquor had been obeyed. But, as Mr. Straight knew, there was in these sad cases a very great craving for liquor. Was it possible that Francesca, who seemed so attached to her mistress, secretly gratified her craving ?

" No," Straight replied, " he had no special reason to suspect the maid." But he added coldly, " I cannot personally ransack a lady's trunks." And Straight returned to his novel and his cigarettes.

The end came sooner than was anticipated. One morning, three days out from the Bahamas, he was summoned to the cabin in which Alice had lain since the beginning of the voyage. From a high state of excitability in which she had passed the previous day and a greater portion of the night, she had passed to a condition of general collapse, and was now sinking rapidly.

She was roused to receive her husband's visit, and the two were left alone.

Alice's lack-lustre eyes brightened for a moment as Douglas came towards her.

"They tell me I am going, Douglas," she said in her weak voice, as he bent over her. "I want to say good-bye. I've been a poor wife to you, Douglas, darling, but you will soon be free. Kiss me just once, as you did long ago."

The last words were almost inaudible ; the thin arms unclosed their feeble grasp, and all was over.

She was buried at sundown Douglas Straight was free from his incubus.

At the dull splash of the shotted coffin he looked up and noticed the eyes of Francesca fixed upon him with a curious, questioning expression in them.

Sympathetic ladies on board remarked that Mr. Straight evidently felt his wife's death very keenly. He looked quite ten years older.

(To be concluded.)

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Alfreda.

By MRS. LODGE,
Author of "GEORGE ELVASTON," etc.

CHAPTER XL.

"I AM afraid Bertha is getting herself entangled with young Mr. Cavot," remarked the Duchess of Morton to the Dowager Countess of Chineron, as they sat together in a recess of the ball-room at Mortoun Castle.

The countess looked absently at Bertha, as though thinking of something else. Bertha was at the moment dancing with Robert Cavot, and really looked quite animated—even beautiful. "Well, what objection have you to Mr. Cavot?" she asked, as though utterly indifferent about the matter.

"Objection?" echoed the duchess. "He may be everything that's excellent for aught I know, but he is not a suitable party for Bertha Chineron."

"Oh, I dare say Bertha will follow her own inclination—why should not she?" answered the countess in the same apathetic manner.

"You take things rather coolly," said the duchess in an annoyed tone. "I imagined you regarded the name of Chineron with far more pride."

"What can I do? Bertha is not amenable to me for her actions."

"But you might show your disapprobation, at least."

"Well, what if I do disapprove? You should remember that Bertha is free to marry whom she will."

"Really, as I said, you take things coolly. One would have imagined nothing could be more distasteful to you than for your son's widow to marry beneath her."

"Bertha will not heed my feelings on such a matter," replied the countess with a bored air. "I shall never seek to influence her choice one way or the other."

"Well, if you are content, I assure you I am not," said the duchess knitting her brows. "I mean to have a talk with Mr. Cavot. He should have more sense of the fitness of things. What position has he to offer to the widow of an earl, with twenty thousand a year in her own right?"

Before the countess could reply Lady Maud joined them. "Why are you not dancing?" asked the duchess, as she made room for the young lady to sit beside her. "Where is Norland?"

Lady Maud pointed with her fan at a pair who were just on the point of standing up for the next quadrille.

"Who is he standing up with?" asked the duchess, putting her glass to her eye. "I don't seem to remember the girl."

"Neither do I," said the countess, applying her glass to her eye also. "Who is she, Maud?"

"Miss Miffkins."

"Miffkins!" exclaimed the duchess, elevating her eyebrows; "who on earth is Miffkins? and how came she here?"

"She goes everywhere. The men don't consider a dance worth attending unless graced by the pretty American."

"Has the air of a French opera-dancer," replied the duchess. "I wish Ellen would be rather more exclusive."

"Haven't I told you the fair Miffkins goes everywhere? She was at Marlborough House the other evening."

"That is no reason that she should be at Mortoun Castle this evening," said the duchess with a shrug of her shoulders. "Miffkins! Heavens, what a name!"

Lady Maud laughed. "Algy thinks it poetical. He has already danced three times with Miffkins, and is down on her card for—well, perhaps as many more."

Algy was the duchess's grandson and heir to the dukedom. The ball had been given at the castle in honour of his coming of age.

"And how many times has she danced with Norland?" asked the duchess, tapping the young lady's arm with her fan.

"Haven't taken note. When she's not dancing with Algy she favours Norland above all others. Next to diamonds an American girl loves a duke; and really the fair Miffkins seems to have bor-

rowed the entire stock-in-trade of Storr and Mortimer for this particular event," said Lady Maud.

"I am heartily tired of the American beauties ; they are quite too bizarre and pushing. There's not the least refinement or repose about them. Look at that girl, dancing with the zest of a ballerino," remarked the countess, with a cold, contemptuous stare at the unconscious Miss Miffkins, who was skimming over the floor with tiny twinkling feet, like an Andalusian maid.

"She has a certain kind of prettiness, for all that," said the duchess rather maliciously. "Norland evidently admires her vastly, and all the world considers his taste unexceptionable."

"Algy will tell you that she is adorable, spiritual and——"

"Divine!" added a merry voice close beside her.

"Oh, Algy. I was sure you'd say so," cried Lady Maud. "But have you a moment to spare to any one but your divinity?"

"My thoughts are with her—my outer man remains entirely at your service," replied the youth gaily, as he offered Lady Maud his arm.

"The rooms are getting rather warm. I should like an ice," said Lady Maud as they moved about among the guests.

"Let us go into the conservatory ; I'll bring you an ice there," suggested Algy good-naturedly.

He seated her beneath a spreading palm, then hastened away to get her some refreshment from the buffet.

The quadrille was ended by this time ; some of the dancers came into the conservatory to enjoy its refreshing coolness. Lady Maud drew back under the shade of the palm tree and remained unnoticed.

Suddenly she drew a quick breath and shrank still further into the shade ; the Duke of Norland at that moment entered the conservatory with the fair American leaning on his arm.

She was a bright piquant brunette with dark sparkling eyes, very white teeth, which she was somewhat lavish to display, and a tall lissom figure that possessed a sort of willowy motion as she walked, quite unlike the graceful, upright carriage of an English maiden of the upper ten.

She was exquisitely attired in the newest Parisian *mode* and perhaps a little too overladen with pearls and diamonds for an unmarried woman ; but fresh, fascinating and brilliantly beautiful withal.

"No, no, I shall not dance with you again to-night; I stand too much in fear of Mrs. Grundy to do anything so dreadfully improper as to monopolize the best dancer of the party," she said laughingly, as they walked through the conservatory and passed out through the south door on to the garden terrace.

Lady Maud rose up and looked after the pair with a gleam in her eye and a smile on her lip.

Then she drew her chair forward to the light and sat down to await the return of Algy.

He did not put her patience to the test, however; in a few minutes she saw him coming towards her, followed by a footman bearing light refreshments enough for half-a-dozen ladies at the least.

Algy appeared rather disappointed when he found she would partake of nothing but an ice, although he, himself, after lauding champagne as the only perfect restorative, simply contented himself with a glass of iced lemonade.

"You see," said he, by way of explanation, "I have to tread another measure with the divine——"

"Miffkins," interposed Lady Maud with a silvery laugh.

"Oh, pray don't, you madden me! What a horrid name!" he cried, with a comical expression of horror. "Miffkins! No rose could be perfect with such a name; one of us fellows ought to marry the divine creature, if only out of pure charity to bestow on her a more euphonious cognomen."

"Are not you in a charitable mood yourself? Your name would go rather better with diamonds than her own."

Algy laughed and shrugged his shoulders. "I am a Christian, and with us charity should begin at home," said he in a mock-heroic tone. "I think of the horror of my grandam should I be rash enough to offer to graft a Miffkins on the genealogical tree."

Lady Maud could not help laughing at this little pleasantry, calling him a naughty satirical boy as she took his arm and sauntered towards the south door of the conservatory.

On stepping on to the terrace, Algy drew back quickly; he had caught sight of Norland and the fair American standing rather too closely together for mere ball-room acquaintances.

Lady Maud, however, went straight onward with a calm smile on her lips. Did she see the duke or did she not? He was

standing within a few paces on her left, with his arm around the waist of the fascinating American girl, one of her ungloved hands pressed to his lips.

If the high-bred English girl saw this she made no sign. They might have been a pair of marble statues adorning the terrace for all the notice she took of them.

Turning to the right, she walked along the terrace with her usual quiet graceful movement. She neither bridled up nor flashed looks of scorn on her affianced lover, as some less thorough-bred woman might have done.

"Well, I call that too bad. Norland is behaving shamefully," exclaimed Algy, when they were out of hearing.

"What, jealous?" cried Lady Maud, elevating her eyebrows.

"Phew, no! but I thought you wouldn't like such goings on as that."

"Oh, it matters not in the least to me."

"No! is it possible?"

"Quite, I assure you."

"Really, but then you are engaged to him, you know."

"We are no longer engaged," she said proudly.

"And you are free?" cried the young man eagerly, his eyes becoming luminous as with some inward light.

Lady Maud withdrew her hand from his arm; her face became overclouded with sadness.

"Free!" she echoed. "Yes, free as the night wind that sighs over some wintry waste—just as free, and as cold, and as lonely for aye."

"Maud—dearest Maud, will you listen to me?" he cried with breathless eagerness, trying to take her hand.

"No, Algy, no. I have loved and lost—I shall never listen to a love tale again—so let us continue friends as of old."

"One moment, Maud, only one moment," he pleaded, as she was about to retire through an open French window that led to her own room.

"No, not one," she laughed, resuming her gayest air. "Go and tread the promised measure with Miffkins the fair, who doubtless begins to wonder what has become of her truant knight."

I am sorry to relate that the young nobleman anathematized Miss Miffkins savagely when Lady Maud glided through the French window and closed the casement behind her.

CHAPTER XLI.

ONE morning, not long after the ball at Mortoun Castle, the Dowager Countess of Chineron was seated with her daughter at a round breakfast-table in the south dining-room of Chillingwood House.

She was looking pale and worn, lines of care were beginning to furrow her fair, smooth brow, and in the full morning light her hair looked faded, even grey.

A pile of letters lay unopened at her side, but she appeared too listless and preoccupied to make the least exertion.

"I think, Maud," she remarked peevishly, "that it is time to bring matters to a conclusion. Your engagement has lasted quite long enough. I shall ask Hardbend to hint as much to Norland."

"It can only come to one conclusion after Norland's behaviour with Miss Miffkins," replied her daughter firmly.

"Pooh, nonsense! You surely do not intend to break off your engagement because Norland carried on a ball-room flirtation with some underbred girl."

Her daughter raised her head with quiet dignity.

"Mother, in this instance I claim the right to decide for myself."

"Think well before taking any rash step," said the countess severely. "If you break with Norland you must be prepared to give up society altogether. I have decided not to chaperon you this season; my nerves are too shattered at present to go out even to a quiet dinner. I had hoped that your marriage would have taken place shortly after our return home from the continent; besides, I find that the English climate no longer suits me, and moving about alone alleviates the *ennui* from which I suffer. Are you prepared to accompany me in my wanderings, and to bear with the constant complaining of a capricious invalid for, it may be, years to come, until you are a weazened, neglected old maid yourself?—and this will certainly be your ultimate fate should you break off your engagement with Norland. Such a step, I warn you, would end all chance of your ever being sought in marriage by an eligible *parti* again."

"I am bound to retain my own self-respect at any cost," replied the young lady, with an expression of countenance that

for the moment made her strangely like her proud, inflexible mother.

The countess sighed wearily, but made no answer, and at once began to open her letters.

Lady Maud, who had also a small pile of letters to hand, followed her mother's example, and soon no other sound broke the stillness which pervaded the room save the crisp rustle of unfolding letters.

Suddenly a low moan smote on the ear of the young girl. Looking up quickly, she found her mother had fallen back in her chair, white and rigid as death itself.

Lady Maud flew to the bell and rung it violently; then, without waiting for assistance to arrive, began to bathe her mother's brow with eau de cologne, which she fortunately found close at hand.

It was some time before the countess opened her eyes and made an effort to recollect herself. Then a shudder ran through her frame as she whispered, like one awaking from a painful dream, "The blow has fallen at last!"

It was too evident she had received a sudden shock which might prove dangerous.

With great presence of mind the house steward immediately dispatched a mounted messenger for the family medical attendant, but before he arrived the countess recovered sufficiently to reach her own room with the assistance of her maids. Before she rose from her chair, however, she took care to have all her letters gathered up and given into her own hands.

She would not suffer her daughter to stay with her. She said perfect quiet and repose would alone restore her—her nerves were too shattered to bear even her daughter's presence for awhile.

Thoughtfully and sadly Lady Maud retired to await Doctor Ashley's arrival. Some secret care, she felt certain, had long preyed on her mother's mind, and now doubtless the blow she dreaded had fallen. But what dire misfortune could have happened to prostrate her all in a moment?

She wearied her brain in vain to guess even from whence such a terrible blow had fallen with that death-like force.

When the countess's medical attendant reached her bedside he found her lethargic and feverish. That she had received a sudden shock he at once concluded, but of what nature, or from

whence it came, neither her daughter nor her attendants quite knew. The letter that might have thrown some light on the subject had been burnt by the countess's own maid by her mistress's order before she would consent to lay her head on the pillow. This fact, however, the maid, who was an old and faithful attendant, did not think fit to disclose, so the cause of her ladyship's illness remained a mystery.

Before many hours elapsed the countess became quite unconscious, and for weeks lay prostrated with brain fever.

Through her long illness Lady Maud watched by her bedside with unwearied attention and devoted, affectionate zeal.

It was seldom she allowed any one but Prior, her ladyship's devoted attendant, to share her watch by the sufferer's bedside.

There were short intervals of apparent return to consciousness, when it was sad to see the eager, questioning gaze with which she would regard her daughter's face. At such times her faithful attendant, ever on the watch, would approach her mistress and say in a calm, reassuring tone, "There are no letters to-day, my lady, nor is there any message for your ladyship." This oft-repeated formula seemed to soothe the sufferer, who would close her eyes with a profound sigh of relief, and sometimes fall into a troubled sleep.

But there were times when nothing could soothe or allay the dread of some impending calamity overtaking her.

There were times, also, of fearful delirium, when the sick woman raved of people and things that made Lady Maud shiver and feel sick at heart. She tried her best to think it was only the fancies of a fevered brain ; but, alas, try as she would, she could not divest herself of a growing conviction that the mother whom she had always thought the nearest to perfection of any mortal, was not the immaculate, high-souled woman she had been taught to reverence from her earliest years.

When at length the fever abated and the countess regained consciousness, her cold impassive manner began to return, but that haunted look still lingered in her eyes ; she was as imperious, too, and self-willed as ever. Spite of the remonstrances of her attendants and the express command of her physician, she insisted on rising from her couch and reclining on the sofa in her dressing-room before an open window ere the fever had left her a week, but no one as yet had been allowed to see her or con-

verse with her, the doctors fearing a relapse if she were not kept perfectly quiet and free from all excitement.

The countess was not pronounced out of danger when word was sent to Lady Maud that Charley, her little nephew, had been ailing for some days past, and it was feared that he had caught the scarlet fever, which was then raging in the village close by Chillingwood Chase.

How to break this disquieting intelligence to her mother, Lady Maud knew not, as the countess was thought to be devotedly attached to her grandson. To her daughter's great relief, however, she took the matter very calmly, merely remarking that Bertha was always too anxious about Charley and his childish ailments.

To the surprise of every one around her the countess rapidly regained strength ; it seemed as though her iron will was able to overcome even weakness and prostration.

"Maud, I must have change of air ; this place is killing me !" she said quite abruptly to her daughter one morning, as she sat propped up with pillows in an easy-chair. "I know Doctor Ashley will say I am not strong enough to travel, but I begin to feel that is my only chance of final recovery."

Her daughter knew not what to answer. She saw plainly that her mother was quite unfit to take a journey, however short, in her present state of health. "What would you have me do ?" she asked, not daring to point out the utter impossibility of complying with the invalid's wish.

"I would have you give orders to pack up immediately, and prepare for our leaving England within the week at latest. We can travel by easy stages, rest a few days at Folkestone and again at Boulogne. Meantime, do not oppose my wish ; rather set my mind at ease by promising to comply with what I so eagerly desire, then I will take all the rest I can and gather up my strength for the journey."

"I shall be only too pleased to comply with your wishes," answered her daughter. "No doubt a change will do you good. Prior must see about making every necessary arrangement for your comfort without delay."

The young lady thought it best to humour the invalid, as her highly nervous condition rendered the least opposition to her wishes dangerous.

After the countess received this reassuring answer she sat silent for some minutes with her head resting on her hand. Then all at once she asked in a confused, hesitating manner if any unpleasant intelligence had arrived during her illness, or in fact had anything unusual taken place recently?

She looked up quickly as she asked the latter question, and fixed her eyes searchingly on her daughter's face.

Lady Maud trembled and turned pale; sad news had indeed arrived not an hour since, but she had not dared communicate it to the invalid until Doctor Ashley's arrival, fearing the effect it would produce on her mother in her present weak, nervous condition.

The countess was quick to note her daughter's agitation. "I know you are keeping something back from me!" she exclaimed, her hands beginning to tremble with nervous anxiety, her face to look flushed and her eyes troubled. "Something unpleasant has happened, I read it in your face. I can bear anything rather than this dreadful suspense, so pray tell me the worst at once!"

"You know already that Charley has been dangerously ill," hesitated her daughter.

"I know he is ill, but not dangerously so; well, go on, you have something worse to tell me!"

Lady Maud broke down and burst into tears. She could find no words to tell her mother that the little heir of the house lay dead.

The countess fell back in her chair and shaded her face with her fan, as a long shivering sigh escaped her; she at once realized the cause of this sudden fit of weeping.

Then followed a long silence, broken only by the heartrending sobs of Lady Maud, who could no longer control her long pent-up emotion. She was devotedly attached to her little nephew, who had always been regarded as the heir and hope of the house of Chineron.

Suddenly the countess started and, clasping her hands, uttered a low moan. The sound of the passing-bell with its solemn note of warning to careless mortals that none are too young to die, tolled out the number of years of him who had just passed away.

"Poor darling boy, he is at rest—at rest," murmured the invalid softly. "Well, it is better so; they cannot rob him of his rest."

CHAPTER XLII.

NO one ever heard the countess mention the name of her little grandson after his death. Her most trusted attendant could not have told whether the sorrow that clouded her life had been deepened by the early death of the young heir.

She was never seen to shed a tear, but then the countess was not one given to weeping. The deepest sorrow is often borne with hot, dry, tearless eyes.

She gained strength, however, daily and daily grew more impatient to set out on her journey.

Her only relief appeared to be in watching trunk after trunk packed and corded, in readiness for her departure.

She could not well tear Lady Maud away from the side of the poor bereaved mother, who was utterly heart-broken over the loss of her only son ; but she decided to start on the very next day after the funeral.

But when the day arrived Lady Maud was found utterly prostrated ; she had gone through so much wearing anxiety and grief during the past month or two, that a few days' rest was absolutely necessary to recruit her strength before undertaking a journey.

The countess almost chafed herself into a fever at this delay. Indeed, she would have started without her daughter had not her privileged attendant flatly refused to accompany her if Lady Maud was left behind.

The physician made the most of the young lady's indisposition, it is true, as he strongly opposed the countess's journey and warned her that she would in all probability break down before she crossed the channel.

She paid no heed to his warning, however ; her only desire was for change of scene ; her restless mood could only be appeased by constantly moving from one place to another.

At the end of a week Lady Maud was so evidently better that no further excuse could be invented for delaying their departure any longer.

The house was to be shut up and the servants dismissed, except one maid servant who was retained to wait on the house-keeper, who was left in charge of the mansion.

An air of discomfort and desolation already began to pervade

the place and the signs of the coming departure of the family were visible in every room and vestibule.

On the day before their intended departure, Lady Maud drove over to the Chase to take leave of Lady Bertha Chineron. She found her sister-in-law depressed and anxious.

"I am so glad you have come, Maud," were almost the first words she greeted her with. "I am worried and puzzled beyond measure by a communication I have received to-day from the family solicitor—Meldon is always tediously oracular, but this letter is quite beyond my comprehension. It speaks of complications and unforeseen contraventions, and bids me prepare myself to receive unpleasant disclosures shortly, of quite a startling character. Now what on earth can it all mean? and why couldn't Meldon speak out plainly at once, instead of racking my poor weary brain with mystifications of this sort?"

When Lady Maud read the letter at Bertha's request she was equally mystified; but after a little reflection she began to fear that the unpleasant disclosures threatened to be soon made known were in some way connected with her brother's untimely fate and her mother's recent illness.

"Well, what do you make of the letter?" asked Bertha, seeing the pained expression on the other's face.

"I am afraid that in some way the promised revelations will throw some light on the cause of poor George's untimely end," she replied with great emotion.

"May heaven fend!" exclaimed Bertha, starting up in great excitement. "If he erred he paid the penalty to the extent of his life, and I would rather give up all I possess than have his name held up to scorn. For myself I have wearied my brain through many a sleepless night, vainly endeavouring to fix on some adequate cause for that rash and fearful act, which terminated his life. But tell me, what do you suspect? What do you know?"

"I know of nothing definite," replied Lady Maud with some hesitation, "but I have heard he became entangled in some love affair with—with a person just before he left for India, and that she disappeared soon afterwards and poor George never saw her again until that day on which he raised his hand to take his own life."

Lady Chineron wrung her hands and burst into tears.

"God forgive the high-handed ones who brought about our ill-fated union!" she exclaimed passionately. "Ours was not a love match on either side, but poor George was the kindest and most forbearing of husbands; say what they will, a kinder and truer heart never beat in the human breast than his. He was upright and just in all his dealings and especially thoughtful for the weak and helpless. No, Maud, no, it cannot be that the trial that awaits me comes from the source you dread."

"You are right, Bertha; I never knew him commit an unjust or unkind act in his life; no brother and sister ever regarded each other with more sincere devotion than we did. I hope from my inmost soul that my fears are unfounded——"

"They must be. What can this woman allege against him after the lapse of so many years?" interrupted Bertha passionately. "I for one will never listen to her tale! Do you know, Maud, I feel as though another blow of unkind fate would slay me, I am so utterly heart-broken and desolate. Did you but know what it is to feel desolate and alone in the one great sorrow of your life, as I do, you would pity me."

"I am not free from heartache either," replied the young lady sadly; "and, alas! I also know something of that desolation of spirit which is worse than death itself."

"Then you will listen all the more readily to me, dear Maud, for I must tell out my grief, or my heart will burst with long pent-up anguish. Years ago I loved some one, no matter whom, but my friends interposed, and, although the attachment was mutual, we had to go our different ways in life. Well, when I was free once more we met again. He had never ceased to love me—had remained unmarried for my sake. What, then, more natural than that we should renew the past?"

"He asked me, and I consented to become his wife before the present year ran out.

"We did not think fit to announce our engagement until within a month or two of the day we had fixed for our marriage.

"He knew that his own relatives would approve his choice, and for myself, as I was my own mistress, I decided to turn a deaf ear to any remonstrances or opposition that came from my side of the house.

"I flattered myself that our attachment was unknown to any

one save our own two selves. But that dreadful argus-eyed grandam of mine spied it out, and—oh, can I ever forgive her?—spoke privately to Robert on the subject. She knew well where to strike and to wound him sorely, and she did it so effectually that he declared, much as he loved me, he would never enter any family that looked down on him as a mean, mercenary wretch. And now I am bereaved of my child, threatened with I know not what misfortune, and not one true friend to lean on!”

“Women of our class, I suppose, seldom marry the man of their choice,” said Lady Maud with a sigh and a far-away look in her deep violet eyes. “We must be brave, Bertha, and take life as we find it.”

“Ah, but you, Maud—what can you know of disappointment and heartache? If you loved Norland, you should not have been so hard on him.”

“But suppose I did not love him?”

“Then you were quite right in breaking off the engagement. One can forgive much in the husband of one’s choice—very little in the one chosen for us. I am sorry, Maud, that I have been rather hard on you; but I thought, with Fanny and her husband, that you did it through caprice. You have stood your own bravely, however. Does the countess know it yet?”

“No, I dared not tell her. My life will be none of the most enviable once she is acquainted with that fact. For the present her mind is fixed on one idea; she counts the hours until we leave Chillingwood.”

“She is greatly changed,” said Bertha with some show of kindly feeling; “but her will is as dominant as ever.”

To this Lady Maud made no answer. She would never own to any one that her mother was not perfection. She loved to think of her as her ideal of womanhood. High-handed and proud she certainly was, but truthful and honourable, and quite free from all petty jealousy and meanness.

“Good-bye,” said Bertha with a rush of feeling, when Lady Maud at length rose to take leave. “I feel dreadfully anxious about this journey. What will you do if your mother falls ill amongst strangers?”

“When I think of that my heart fails me, but I hope for the best. We take a trained nurse and three maids with us.”

"God speed you, and good-bye once more," cried Bertha, embracing her. "Heaven alone knows what trials may fall to our lot ere we meet again, dearest Maud."

CHAPTER XLIII.

MRS. TRIMBLY all at once became an object of interest to the "wide, wide world."

She was not to be silenced by the astute and wily Doctor Pounceford, either by civil speeches or proffered bribes. She was determined, in her own homely phrase, "to have the law of him" for her forced incarceration in a mad-house.

And in due course the case of Trimble *v.* Pounceford came on for hearing. Damages were laid at two thousand pounds.

Serjeant Slasher was retained for the plaintiff, whilst the great Balderdash, Q.C., with two junior counsel, came on for the defendant.

Public attention had been called to this action at law before the case came on for hearing by sensational paragraphs in some of the leading dailies, wherein it was stated that startling disclosures were expected about the internal arrangements and the modes of torture practised on patients in some private lunatic asylums, where persons who were perfectly sane were kept in durance at the instigation of designing relatives interested in getting them out of the way.

Never had the stuffy law court been more crowded than on the day when the case of Trimble *v.* Pounceford came on for hearing.

The moment the doors were thrown open well-dressed women rushed in and pushed—nay, even fought—to gain foremost places, just as a crowd might have done at the pit entrance of a theatre on Boxing Night.

Serjeant Slasher opened the case with unwonted eloquence. He appeared to rise to the occasion, as though he had made his client's wrongs his own, and expected damages accordingly. His voice thrilled with emotion when he assured the gentlemen of the jury that his client, who was a woman of irreproachable character, the wife of a respectable man and the mother of growing sons, had been treated with the most shocking and cruel indignity by the minions of the defendant. Had the officers of the law dared to treat a woman arrested for some horrible crime

as these minions had treated his innocent client, the press and the public generally would have condemned their conduct in no measured terms. And yet the defendant wanted to palliate this brutal treatment of a defenceless woman by the plea of mistaken identity. Well, even so, the same fearful treatment would evidently have been inflicted on that other defenceless female had she happened to fall into the clutches of the defendant and his hirelings. Here Serjeant Slasher looked at the sleek, faultlessly-dressed defendant so severely that one would have thought he (the learned serjeant) considered Doctor Pounceford ought, at that moment, to be standing in the dock instead of sitting by his solicitor. "No amount of damages in which the defendant might be cast," he went on, "would be an adequate penalty to pay for the insult and indignity heaped on the head of his innocent client, through his (the defendant's) instrumentality." The learned serjeant then detailed in moving language the sufferings his client had undergone during that fearful drive through the London streets, and her incarceration in a mad-house.

The appearance of Mrs. Trimby in the witness-box caused a flutter of excitement to run through the court.

The plain, straightforward, matter-of-fact way in which she gave her evidence produced a most favourable impression. Quite a thrill of pity was observed to run through the assemblage when she described, in homely English, the way in which she had been decoyed down stairs, thrust into a carriage, gagged to stop her cries, and bound hand and foot to prevent her escape; how every indignity had been put on her by the women who helped to convey her to Doctor Pounceford's establishment, women who did not appear to have any ruth or kindness in their nature, and rather enjoyed the sufferings they inflicted on any helpless creature in their power.

There was no gainsaying her evidence. Truth was apparent in every word she uttered.

The learned Balderdash himself sat down evidently beaten after ten minutes' cross-examination of the plaintiff.

Next day the features of Mrs. Trimby, her complexion, the colour of her hair, the expression of her fearless honest eyes, her dress, even to the tie of her bonnet strings, were accurately described by the reporters of some half-dozen morning papers. And very soon afterwards the pictorial papers were profusely illustrated

with portraits both of the plaintiff and defendant, together with supposed views of the house in Dean Street and Lethal Home for Mental Invalids.

In some papers the plaintiff was represented as a female of the "Mother Gamp" style, with poke bonnet and baggy umbrella ; in others as a tall slim matron, with beauty fringe and the latest fashion in dress.

One of the reporters of the *Uptodate Gazette* had the good fortune to interview Mrs. Trimble as she wended her way homeward through Trafalgar Square.

"Were you greatly troubled during your incarceration," he asked, "about what your husband and family might think, when they found you did not return home as the weary hours wore on?"

"No, sir, it was not of them or myself I thought," replied the noble working English woman ; "I could think of nothing during that long and weary night of my incarceration but the poor unhappy creatures confined within the walls of that fearful prison-house—to me it appeared a living tomb, where poor helpless mortals might easily be thrust by designing hands, to linger out their existence in hopeless misery. How could I think of self with so much unmerited suffering around me? No, sir, I thought of my helpless fellow-prisoners, and pondered how such a state of things could be either 'mended or ended.'"

Here she drew herself up, and raising her eyes heavenward, pointed with her toil-worn hand towards the Clock Tower that loomed out clear and distinct against the sunset sky, and said, with the air of an ancient prophetess, regardless of the gathering crowd, who stared at her with wonder not unmixed with awe: "Think you, sir, that if women sat in yonder House—as sit some day they must—to legislate, they would suffer such a system of cruelty and oppression to exist in this land of boasted freedom? I am but a working woman of the people, yet through me this hideous system has received a blow that shall resound through the length and breadth of the land, and the echo of it shall never cease until every private mad-house in England is levelled in the dust!"

Indeed, Mrs. Trimble appeared from that time forward to be endowed with a wonderful amount of ready eloquence, and made statements enough to her interviewers to fill the pages of a three-volume novel.

In short, the wildest stories were invented concerning the plain matter-of-fact Mrs. Trimble that it was possible for the wildest flights of fancy to conceive.

Her supposed likeness was in every illustrated publication, and her photograph might be found displayed in shop windows, side by side with royalty and ladies of histrionic fame.

The case of *Trimble v. Pounceford* lasted three-and-twenty days, and cost more than as many hundreds in hard cash.

The cross-examination of the defendant alone lasted five days. This was Serjeant Slasher's opportunity; he put him on the mental rack so skilfully that the bland M.D. heartily wished himself locked up in one of his own padded rooms, at the mercy of his surly keepers.

"My client was taken to your Home for Mental Invalids by mistake, you say?" questioned the learned serjeant blandly.

Answer, rather reluctantly given, "Yes."

"Who, then, was the plaintiff taken in mistake for?"

No answer.

Question repeated with emphasis.

"I had rather not reply to that question."

Then followed a long discussion, the judge at length ruling that Doctor Pounceford was bound to answer the question put.

Then came the reluctant admission that Mrs. Trimble had been carried off from Dean Street in mistake for a person called Mathers.

"Pray, was this person you call Mathers married or single?" asked Serjeant Slasher as though some important issue hung on the answer.

"I don't know."

"Will you swear you don't know?"

"I was never told."

"Was she called Mrs. or Miss Mathers?"

"Miss, I think."

"And yet you say you don't know whether she is married or single. Do you consider yours a respectable establishment—first-class in fact?"

"Certainly I do."

"This person called Mathers had a child, had she not?"

"I cannot say."

"You are on your oath, sir; will you swear that you never heard the woman you call Mathers had a daughter?"

"I do not remember hearing it."

"Did not the woman herself tell you so?"

"I did not take any notice of what she said."

"Was the woman you call Mathers insane?"

"Decidedly so."

"Will you swear she needed restraint?"

"Yes."

Then Serjeant Slasher gathered himself up and asked in a voice that thrilled the court :

"Where is that woman and her child now?"

"I do not know," answered the defendant, turning the hue of a winter primrose.

For fully two hours the learned serjeant cross-examined him on this point, but could elicit nothing further of any consequence.

Doctor Pounceford must have been heavily bribed to keep back the name of the person who employed him to carry off Alice from Dean Street to his Home for Mental Invalids, as he evaded the question in the witness-box so persistently as to incur committal to prison for contempt of court.

This episode in the case caused the most sensational rumours to run rife on every side. It was stated by some that the woman called Mathers was the widow of a nobleman, whose friends had conspired to place her in a private lunatic asylum, to gain possession of her child, who was heiress to immense wealth ; whilst others declared she was the morganatic widow of a prince, and it was sought to thrust her into a mad-house so as to silence her effectually from making any statement that would tend to injure influential members of the state.

A noted M.P. famous for making political capital out of any event that exercised the mind of the public, jumped up in the House and demanded of the Rt. Hon. the Home Secretary, "If he, the right hon. gentleman, had found the woman called Mathers? and if not, why not?" in a tone and manner that caused an uncontrollable burst of—I am sorry to add—laughter throughout the assembly.

However, as counsel contended for the defendant, that whereas the woman called Mathers was a patient of Doctor Pounceford's, as proved by two eminent medical men who were called in to consult on the case and testified to finding the woman in a high

state of cerebral excitement, he, the defendant, was not bound to divulge the affairs of his own patient or that of her relatives, and all the more so, as the affairs of this apparently mysterious individual had nothing to do with the question at issue, and her name had only crept into the case to show that the plaintiff had been simply taken from Dean Street in mistake, and not deprived of her liberty by malice aforethought.

The point as to whether the defendant was bound or not to answer questions about his patient's private affairs, which were irrelevant to the case before the court, was argued with great forensic skill, for and against, by counsel on both sides. At length, however, it was ruled in defendant's favour, who was at once released from durance, nor was he again put into purgatory, *i. e.*, the witness-box.

Doctor Pounceford had not created a favourable impression on the court from the first. Perhaps it was chiefly owing to this that he was cast in damages to the full amount claimed, with costs. He also incurred the severe censure of the judge, for the manner in which he had given evidence.

Mrs. Trimbley, as we have said, found herself famous, but we question whether she found herself considerably the richer through the damages awarded her by an intelligent British jury.

CHAPTER XLIV.

"COMING events cast their shadows before." The shadow that had rested so long on the noble house of Chineron at length assumed shape and form.

Alice at last found friends to advocate her cause and bring forward the claim of herself and child to their rightful position and heritage.

The rage and chagrin of the dowager countess when this fact became known knew no bounds.

She had reached Paris before this intelligence was announced to her, and no sooner had she realized that her secret was now public property than she broke down utterly, and a long and dangerous illness followed.

Her daughter nursed her with the most untiring care and devotion, and perhaps it was owing to this that the countess ever rose again from her sick-bed.

It was the turning-point in the proud, haughty woman's life.

The calm, self-possessed, high-bred woman, whose summer beauty rivalled many a belle in her springtime, had all at once become peevish, impatient and weakly passionate. Bent and wan, her beauty faded like an autumn flower nipped by untimely winter frost ; her high ambition dulled or dead, little remained of her former self, except her intense hatred of Alice. No one dared mention that name in her presence, her rage became so terrible.

Her nerves were completely shattered. She started at the slightest sound : would often scream like a frightened child if her chamber door was opened suddenly ; shrank with nervous dread from the face of a stranger, and seldom cared to see a friend.

Her countenance always wore an anxious, troubled look ; her sleep went from her, sometimes for nights together.

The most eminent physicians were consulted in vain. It was the old story over again—"they could not minister to a mind diseased, nor ease the troubled breast."

Not all the combined skill of the *materia medica* could restore the banished sleep to her weary, aching eyelids whilst her bosom was racked with such an array of conflicting passions.

The utter failure of her well-planned schemes to deprive Alice of her rightful position as the wife of her son—the certainty that this hated "creature" would some day reign at Chillingwood in her stead—was far more bitter than gall and wormwood to her proud spirit.

The sting of complete failure, entailing disgrace and misery on all concerned, added to the deep distress and mortification of Bertha, whom she had wilfully drawn into the pitfall, greatly augmented her disquiet.

Not that Bertha ever knew to what extent the dowager countess had knowingly laid this pitfall for her unwary feet. Nothing that Alice averred was ever taken the slightest notice of by any member of the family. Alice was, in fact, the scapegoat ; it was on her shoulders that all the blame and odium was laid.

Indeed, one could scarce tell whether Bertha or the countess received the most sympathy and condolence over this terrible misfortune, which had fallen like a thunderbolt on two noble houses.

The countess was pitied and condoled with on all sides. It was heart-crushing, they declared, to have such an intriguing, low-born creature acknowledged as the widow of her lost son. The dowager countess's set could find no name opprobrious

enough for that *unprincipled usurper*, as they termed Alice—a woman who was considered quite beyond the pale of society. Not one of the upper ten would have remained in the same room with her for an instant.

Not but that the dowager's dearest friends did not shake their heads in private, and declare the whole affair was dreadfully shocking and mysterious ; but even her enemies did not give her credit for the temerity of ignoring the fact of her son's marriage with Alice, and eventually casting forth both wife and child as utter aliens into the world's wide wilderness.

True, her daughter Maud knew something of the part she had played in this painful affair, but it was not for her to denounce her own mother and take Alice by the hand as a woman more sinned against than sinning.

Of one thing alone Lady Maud was truly glad, and that was that she had broken off her engagement with the Duke of Norland before this family scandal had become known to the world.

Her pride would have been wounded to the quick to be looked down on by that haughty patrician as no longer worthy an alliance with his high and noble self.

Bertha turned all her anger and dislike against Alice. She it was who had brought misfortune and disgrace on two noble families, and in her (Bertha's) opinion the deepest dungeon of the Inquisition was the only fit place for the creature who claimed to be the widow of the late earl.

She never would allow that Lord Chineron was to blame for the deception practised on herself. He had married her in all good faith, believing that his first wife died whilst he was in India. And this vile woman, for some fell purpose of her own, had concealed herself from his knowledge until her evil machinations were complete. Then she reappeared on the scene, and hastened her victim to his doom.

This was Bertha's declared view of the matter, and it was sore against her will that the claimant was allowed to establish her claim without a far more strenuous opposition.

If she believed that the dowager countess was to blame for the disappearance of Alice, and that she had concocted the tale of her death to deceive her son, she kept her own counsel. Perhaps she considered it more fitting that the detested usurper of her own rights should bear all the blame and odium.

She kept up a continual correspondence with Lady Maud, and it was a great relief to this young lady's mind when at length she found Bertha's letters assuming a more hopeful view of life. At first, after the blow fell, her letters breathed nothing but despair and desolation. She talked of becoming a convert to the Romish faith and retiring into a convent, that she might pass her future life far, "far from the madding crowd." She was tired of the world, and declared she would welcome even death itself as a release from the mental anguish she endured.

It did not, therefore, come as a surprise to Lady Maud when she learnt, soon after Bertha's letters assumed a more cheerful tone, that she had become engaged to Robert Cavot, and that they were to be married, very quietly, at no distant date.

"Robert has behaved most nobly," she wrote. "He came to me as soon as he heard of the fearful calamity which had overtaken me, saying that no one now would be able to accuse him of interested motives in offering me his hand. It will save me from endless annoyance to shelter myself under my husband's name, and possibly in time my past painful history will be forgotten.

"My haughty grandam now consents to receive Robert's visits; and as I am like the heroine of Wilkie Collins' novel of 'No Name,' she has graciously given her consent to our union."

Lady Maud herself sorely needed comfort at this time, and to know that Bertha's life had not been utterly wrecked by the machinations of others was an untold relief to her mind, although her mother took very little heed concerning Bertha's future. She appeared wholly occupied in chafing over her own defeated ambitious aims, and the triumph of the woman she had injured and despised.

She declared it was her intention to take up her residence on the continent; she would never again return to Chillingwood whilst the Chase was dishonoured by the presence of that creature, a term she always used when speaking of Alice.

When she was strong enough to travel she left Paris for Rome, where she decided on remaining some time. She had sent on before to hire a mansion, or rather a palace, in the Piazza di Spagna, as she disliked staying at an hotel.

Once settled down in the Palazzo Caracci, the life of Lady Maud became lonely and monotonous in the extreme.

The dowager countess for the most part kept to her own suite of rooms, where she often remained for days together, only appearing at their late dinner in a *sála* which immediately adjoined her own boudoir.

Sometimes the dinner was eaten in silence. The countess appeared to have lost all interest in what was passing in the city in which she had taken up her abode.

She declared herself too much of an invalid to go out into society, and declined to receive at home once a week, as her friends urged her to do.

Lady Maud dared not complain of the loneliness and seclusion in which her mother elected to live, as whenever she did venture on this vexed topic, she was reminded that she had been warned in time of the life she would have to live, if she was self-willed enough to break off her engagement with the Duke of Norland.

No existence could well be more dreary than that of Lady Maud's at that time. She was too young to appear in society without a chaperon, so her evenings were mostly spent in a great dreary saloon, which seemed to echo her every movement, without a creature to speak with.

She was completely thrown back on herself, for although she did not care for a constant round of dinners, balls and concerts, yet she was quite too young to give up going into society without regret.

It was her evenings that she found the most unendurable. During the early part of the day she could go out for a walk, attended by her maid, but when the dinner-hour drew nigh and the shades of evening fell, it seemed as though a pall of black brooding despair fell with it.

She sometimes chafed with bitter impatience at the seclusion her mother condemned her to live in. There were plenty of people that winter residing in Rome who would gladly have welcomed the lovely English girl and her proud patrician mother to their receptions, but, as we have said, the countess refused to visit, or receive visitors, and Lady Maud found herself almost as solitary as though they had taken up their abode in some trackless forest.

One evening she sat at an open window just to catch a glimpse of the busy life without. The motley moving crowd amused her for awhile so much that she stepped out on the balcony to get a

better view of it. She had not been there many minutes when a figure caught her eye that made her heart bound ; she made a step forward and leant over the balustrade.

Yes ! her eyes had not deceived her—it was Alex, looking pale and thin, but just as erect and manly as of yore.

She waited until he was within hearing, then, without pausing to reflect, she pronounced his name in a clear distinct voice, that caught his ear at once.

He looked up.

Oh, the sudden light that leaped into his eyes—the glad expression that overspread his handsome features—she had no need to ask if her presence was a welcome one.

In a few moments his footsteps were heard resounding through the long stone corridor.

She flew to the door of the saloon and opened it.

Ah, well, as the stately groom of the chambers did not think fit to remain and witness the welcome that followed, we do not intend to behave like another Paul Pry, and let the world know how these lovers greeted one another.

For lovers they still were, spite of all that had come between them.

But lest some strong-minded person of either sex should consider Alex Cameron rather weakly forgiving to condone the past on the instant, without a little preliminary scene of tears and explanations, we had better state at once that Alex met Lady Hardbend in London shortly after his return to England from the Cape, and that she, in a confidential way, related in what manner her sister had broken off her engagement with Norland : with many other circumstances that plainly told Alex Lady Maud had never ceased to care for him ; and that when she accepted the attentions of the duke, she had done so at the instigations of her high-handed mother rather than in fickleness and bad faith.

He no sooner felt satisfied of this than he took the earliest opportunity of repairing to Rome, with the result we have seen.

“And to think that I mourned you as dead for months,” said Lady Maud, when the first greetings were over. “Oh, the dreary heartache of that time no words can describe ; but tell me, was it true that you were stricken down with that dreadful fever and given over as one past hope ?”

"I was certainly knocked over for a time, but a young fellow of our company, who was a clever doctor, although he failed to succeed in his profession at home, eventually pulled me through, and when I was strong enough insisted on my making for the coast without delay. We found on the company's claim riches beyond the dreams of avarice; but the climate is so deadly, where this wealth of gold and diamonds can be found, that few Englishmen can live in it: more than half of our people perished, and the rest had a hard fight to reach the coast alive. However, we succeeded in bringing with us a few hundredweights of gold dust, and the diamonds I myself placed in the hands of the company's secretary, on my arrival in England, must have been worth several thousand pounds."

"And the baron—is he as much sought after as formerly?" asked Lady Maud in the course of conversation.

"Well, that I hardly know," answered Alex reflectively. "I found him just as debonair and seemingly prosperous as ever. 'Tis said in the City that he is worth millions, but then one never knows how these great financiers stand. Of the score of companies he has floated, one third have already drifted into the Insolvent Court, and the others seem likely to follow in due course. Whether he will come down with a crash, some day, or retire on his gains to his ancestral castle, which he sometimes boasts of in his confiding moments, time alone will reveal."

"But enough of this! Let us talk of what concerns ourselves more nearly. I may seek an interview with your mother in the morning, may I not, dearest Maud?" Then seeing her blush and hesitate, he added a little maliciously: "Must I still wait for a more convenient season, as of old?"

The dowager countess did not receive Alex's proposal for her daughter's hand very graciously.

It was her way to dislike any one who dared to thwart her will, and Alex had thwarted her schemes more than once; she would much rather that he had succumbed to the fever he caught in Africa than return home to marry her daughter Maud.

Still, she did not refuse her consent, for the reason that even her society had become distasteful to her. Her haughty spirit chafed under the consciousness that her crown of perfection had fallen from her brow before her daughter's eyes, and that hence-

forth she would never regard her with reverence, nor obey her will with a child's unquestioning faith.

Had the countess lived in the olden time she would have endowed a convent and have become the abbess, from a mere love of absolute rule. As it was she elected to pass her days in solitary state, eating her heart out with the bitterness of vain regret.

* * * * *

In course of time Alice formally established her claim, and was shortly afterwards installed as mistress of the Chase and appointed guardian of her daughter, who became the acknowledged heiress of the late Earl of Chineron's property. Not that the claim Alice put forward was decided without an immense amount of legal procedure; the question at issue was far too momentous to be dealt with by the court without due inquiry into facts, and mature deliberation on the part of the judges appointed to decide on the merits of the case.

Had the affair happened before the Chancery reform, Bertha and the dowager countess would have thrown the case into Chancery, and there, doubtless, it would have remained until Alice and her daughter had died of poverty, if not old age.

Alice, it is true, would have gloried in having the case tried in open court; she longed to expose the machinations of the dowager countess before the world.

It was not enough to satisfy her revenge that she triumphed over her enemy in establishing her claim; she desired above all things to banish the proud, haughty dame from the great world of fashion where she had queened it so long.

Alice knew quite enough of that exclusive world to be aware that she herself would never be permitted to enter it. The door of the inner-circle would never be opened to her; she must for ever remain beyond the pale of society, as represented by the high-born few.

She had retired to a quiet seaside village in Devonshire soon after that affair in Dean Street. Her uncle, Mr. Merryman, dreaded lest the dowager countess or her satellites should gain possession of Alfreda before she could be made a ward in Chancery, when her abduction would prove a case of felony and attended with too much danger to be attempted with impunity.

Alfreda had narrowly escaped being kidnapped when her mother, by the merest chance, evaded the terrible fate of being carried off by fraud and force to a madhouse.

Had Alice been carried off, instead of Mrs. Trimble, poor Freda would have been left to her fate, and the secret of her birth would have remained with her mother in her prison-house, perhaps for aye.

Was it chance or Providence that watched over this poor persecuted woman and her child? Well, it was doubtless Providence.

The wicked plot, and their plots appear to prosper up to a certain point; then some apparently feeble instrument, like the mouse in the fable, gnaws at the network and the lion comes forth in his strength.

To the town-bred Alfreda that seaside village in Devonshire was a place of "wonderland."

What untold treasures she found along the rocky coast, what delicate branches of seaweed, what stores of shells and shining pebbles, beside the hundred and one marine delights that even children of larger growth find pleasure in gathering up by the ocean shore.

Indeed it is well when poor weary worldlings, full of the good things of this life, can become as little children once more and find pleasure in such simple amusements.

At least this childlike simplicity never came to Alice; she sat moody and apart, gazing into space, brooding, for ever brooding, over her wasted past, or planning some scheme whereby she might humble her proud, implacable adversary, once she found herself mistress of the Chase.

She was so embittered by wrong and privation that even prosperity could neither render her amiable nor cheerful; she appeared to grow harder and less forgiving, when, at length, she found herself in a position to assume her rightful name and station before the world.

It was her misfortune, rather than her fault, to repel those whom she would have most gladly attracted towards her. She did not even win the affections of her child, as she might have done, by some little show of gentle tenderness. Yet she loved her with that strong concentrated love such as only a lone-hearted, slighted woman can feel for her only child.

There are many repellent, reticent women around us, in the world, with warm affections and hearts as true as steel, but we fail to reach the kernel, because we will not take the trouble to break through the hard rough shell.

Yet if the gay, and the great, and the rich held aloof, the sad, and the sick, and the poor blessed Alice, the Countess of Chineron, and welcomed her presence with more love and reverence than is often accorded to those in high station.

Freda was soon simply adored by every cottager within five miles of the Chase; she often accompanied her mother on her errands of mercy, her sweet sunny face lighting up many an abode of sorrow and suffering.

Alice gave with open-handed charity; she had learnt to pity the struggling poor in the school of suffering. No one, in the time of her prosperity, was ever known to seek her aid in vain.

As soon as she took up her abode at the Chase, she offered her uncle, Horace Merryman, a home beneath her roof.

This, however, he declined; the grandeur of the mansion and the staff of liveried menials awed him; he much preferred his stool at the office desk, and his humble lodgings with the genteel Mrs. Limber.

Neither did Alice forget her former friends. She offered David Trimby the under-stewardship of the home estate, with a good dwelling house near the mansion. This offer Trimby and his wife accepted gladly; they were overjoyed at the prospect of settling down so near the child of their adoption.

They were not long in taking possession of their new abode, much to the joy of Freda, who never found herself more happy than when her dear old mammy—as she still called Mrs. Trimby—came over to the grand nursery at the Chase and sang her to sleep with some simple nursery ballad, or told her a fairy tale in the gloaming, as she used to do in the old days, in that dingy upper chamber in Elm Court.

Alfreda is too young and artless, as yet, to understand the full value of high birth and unbounded wealth; in after years she may learn to estimate both at their full value, but we trust that nothing will ever possess the power to change her loving, gentle, trustful nature.

THE END.

Charles Reade.

By ELSIE RHODES.

PART I.

OF all professions perhaps none has been more bitterly attacked than that of the critic. Some people have even said that it is a useless one, and he who engages in it deficient in conscience, in talent and in justice.

Out of all this abuse, however, has come a very genuine advantage. We are learning to define the ideal of criticism. We are waking up to the realization that the business of the critic is not, primarily, to pick out failures and mistakes, or successes and excellences; neither is it to blame or praise; still less to compare one great author with another and ask such questions as "Could Dante Rossetti write sonnets as well as Shakespeare?" "Was Browning as great a poet as Tennyson?"; least of all to presume to say, "This man is right, the other wrong."

It is to study carefully if he may discover the special distinctive feature of the author, and show *that* to the world, that those for whom the poem or book has been written, those, namely, who are so constituted that they can come into touch with such an author, may recognize their own and rejoice.

As a first step towards appreciating the works of Charles Reade it is well to gain as clear an idea as possible of the man as he showed himself to those who knew him, lived with him, loved him.

Why do we fear the partiality of friendly biographers? It is impossible to study a human heart from the outside, and if we would understand one with whom we cannot come into personal contact, our best chance lies in entering with the "side-door key" of his intimate friend.

Charles Reade was born at Ipsden in June, 1814. He was the youngest of nine children, seven boys and two girls.

His father was a fine old English gentleman; fond of hunting and all manly sports; somewhat blustering, choleric and obstinate, but a good husband and father. From him Charles inherited

his tall stature, his handsome face and his abounding sense of humour ; perhaps also his pugnacity and quick temper.

His mother had been much at court before her marriage. She was a distinguished woman in many respects, and the briefest of sketches of Charles which ignored her must be glaringly incomplete.

She was a brilliant conversationalist and wit. She had an almost superabundant vitality and vivacity. Her household arrangements went like clockwork. Haydn trained her musical talent, and her natural wit was sharpened by a friendship with Sheridan. Her society was eagerly sought by many of the greatest men of the early part of our century. However, she came under the influence of Mr. Fox, an evangelical preacher ; and, though her house was as popular as ever, the character of its visitors was changed. Thereafter Ipsden Hall was rarely without a clergyman of the evangelical type.

In her treatment of her children Mrs. Reade was alternately severe and indulgent. Expressions of affection were very rare ; so rare, indeed, that many thought her a hard woman. But that there was in her a strong undercurrent of tenderness became more evident as years went on. She was bigoted, capricious, and somewhat of a domestic tyrant ; but with all her faults she was a true-hearted, earnest, always remarkable woman, and Charles was her favourite son.

"Give us the charge of a child until he is seven, and any one may have him after," say the Jesuits, so much importance do they attach to early influences. For three years (1818-21) the boy was entirely in the charge of his sister Julia. In those years was laid the foundation of whatever excellence he afterwards attained.

Julia was a rarely beautiful personality ; beautiful in mind and body alike. Wonderfully gifted, persevering, with a real aptitude for teaching, possessing the disposition, as we say, "of an angel," and moreover loving her little brother passionately, she taught and trained him, was his most constant companion, his one friend. She taught him to despise mediocrity in any and every shape, and awoke in him the ambition to excel in everything he attempted : incited him to study, and led him on with such steadiness that he loved it : even if he had not, he so adored Julia that he would have done anything for her. She also

developed in him an extraordinary power of minute observation—a quality which stood him in good stead in the business of his life.

But Julia was too lovely, too *spirituelle*, too altogether attractive to stay under the parental roof. When she married, Charles was sent to school.

Over this, unquestionably the most painful portion of his life, there is no temptation to linger. Caned and birched in a revoltingly cruel manner and with daily frequency, it is a wonder that the sensitive, proud little fellow came out of his four years' slavery there with any intelligence at all. Suffice it to say that the hateful character of Hawes in "It is Never Too Late to Mend" is an exact portrait of his first schoolmaster.

His second, Mr. Hearn, of Staines, was all that the first was not. He *educated* his pupils and looked after their bodily no less than their mental health. He had hard work to undo the harm done by his predecessor, but, thanks to his sympathy, kindness, perseverance and policy of non-restraint, Charles's love of learning came to life again. At thirteen he was healthy, graceful, agile and attractive, the sullen endurance gone from his face and replaced by vivacity and interest.

Two things are of import in connection with these years.

His dramatic talent was developing. Power of appreciating a "situation," intuitive perception of the one thing to be done, quick adaptability to circumstances, absolute control over his facial expression: these are *en évidence* in many a school-boy prank.

And his literary talent was discovered by Mr. Hearn. Himself a master of the English language, he was a most unsparing critic of the work of his pupils, and took endless pains to teach them terseness, clearness, exactness of expression. It would be difficult to over-estimate the service he thus rendered the future author.

In due time Charles became Demy of Magdalen College.

The dull routine and strict etiquette of the most exclusive of the Oxford colleges was not at all to the taste of this born Bohemian. There, conformity to a cloistral ideal was the one aim of life; he "cared for none of these things," and absented himself as much as possible from the men's society both at dinner and in the common-room. Anything like individuality was

strenuously disapproved there, and as Reade *bristled* with it he felt he was unwelcome, and kept to himself more and more, reading voraciously, playing the violin, dancing the double-shuffle, and exercising his powers as an actor by practising parts before a large mirror. So determined was he to preserve independence in life and thought that he even wore his hair longer than any other Demy, and dressed in clothes of strange cut and colour.

Being a younger son he was not rich, and in spite of his mother's generosity could not afford to lose his chance of a Fellowship. But he neglected lectures as much as he dared, only followed the prescribed course of reading so far as he was obliged, and spent the greater part of his time in the Oxford libraries reading "to please himself," *i.e.*, books of all centuries, all countries, and of all kinds.

After gaining his fellowship he had to choose between the Church and the Bar, and in 1836 took up his residence in Lincoln's Inn.

The dry verbosity and red-tapism were naturally hateful to him. Here was a man brimming over with life and health and human nature; burning to distinguish himself; hungering for sympathy; his head full of the drama, his heart of intense and growing interest in his kind—and he was set to read the works of Dry-as-Dust week in week out in Lincoln's Inn!

One is not surprised to learn that he dropped it entirely from about 1837-1842.

In vacation he walked a great deal, both in England and Scotland, and preferred this mode of travelling to any other. He was also apt to make sudden resolutions, and that he might start from Ipsden or London at literally a moment's notice, he kept complete suits of clothes at both houses.

One summer he spent between Paris, Geneva and the Rhine. Mrs. Reade provided the funds for the tour. Though there was much in Charles that crossed her strong evangelical prejudices—for Ipsden society had disgusted him with ecclesiasticism and he had greatly scandalized the whole household by seizing his violin one night and, to a highly spirited accompaniment, dancing the double-shuffle on the polished oval drawing-room table—he was to the last her favourite son, and there was always more sympathy between them than between Charles and his father.

During this tour he wrote charming letters to her. No

individual or characteristic trait of the people or countries he visited ever escaped him.

After another year's enforced residence in college, occasioned by his becoming Dean of Arts, he rented rooms in Leicester Square. His extreme fondness for animals must have made him a troublesome lodger, for he kept numerous pets, and valued his window curtains chiefly on account of the shelter and amusement they afforded to his squirrels.

Not infrequently he disguised himself and studied low life. Many an odd character he discovered in this way. He was far too sensitive for his own happiness, and when among conventional people, or those who treated him with suspicion or coldness, nothing could be more icily calm and indifferent than his manner, more impenetrable than his expression. On the other hand, freed from such restraints and face to face with genuine human nature, his wealth of tenderness and power of sympathy drew the hearts of men and women towards him, and he saw into their very souls.

At 45 years of age Charles Reade was a perfect gentleman : handsome, with distinguished manners, and an almost ridiculously youthful appearance. He was adored by juveniles, preferred women's society to men's, and became at once the centre of any circle into which he chanced to come.

He did not marry, probably for pecuniary reasons ; but "Margaret Brandt" was drawn by the hand of a 'lover.'

At this comparatively late period of his life, with health and faculties unimpaired, rich in experience, possessing extraordinary stores of observation, and as full of the zest of life at fifty as he had been at thirty, he began his life work.

He commenced writing. Not novels. The drama was his first, and to the last, his chief love. He wrote eighteen plays and several short articles, and for three years not a single MS. was accepted by either manager or editor ! Such a bitter record of failure, though not for a day did it discourage, aged and somewhat soured him. He was not mercenary, and though the money which his toil should have brought him would have been very welcome, he felt far more keenly the utter want of sympathy in his life.

At last, however, he was permitted to read part of a play to a leading actress at the Haymarket. Mrs. Laura Seymour was a

clever—more, an intellectual—woman, very brave, and, above all, large-hearted. She was not a “great” actress: talent and intelligence and intense love of her art could not quite supply the place of genius; but she proved the good angel of Charles Reade, although in their first interview she wounded him. After expressing approval of the dramatic situations, she turned on him quickly with:

“But why don’t you write novels?”

Now what is more aggravating than to receive such a broad hint that we are more suited to work which seems to us of a lower order than to this in which lies our whole heart and which we feel we are born to do?

“Another misunderstanding,” he thought bitterly, and left abruptly. Mrs. Seymour, thinking his sadness arose from want of money, sent him a very kind and sympathetic note accompanied by £5. This brought my lord to her very quickly to return the money and to thank her for the other far more valuable gift.

Thenceforth she was his truest, dearest friend. She and her husband and Charles Reade occupied the same house, and until the day of her death she superintended his household affairs.

This friendship marked the beginning of his literary career. Thereafter he wrote unceasingly. “Never a day without a line” was his motto, and he lived up to it. The story of his later life was very little more than the story of his works.

He was in the midst of writing “Hard Cash” when Mrs. Reade died. He does not say much about it—he felt too deeply; but the letter telling Laura Seymour of her death is blotted with his tears.

Two qualities laid him open to considerable suffering: his extreme sensitiveness and his passionate love of justice. This latter made him an easy prey to designing people and led him into much expense and some odd situations. His incorrigible taste for theatrical speculation plunged him more than once into great pecuniary difficulties. There came a time, however, when his financial troubles were over, and then he and Mrs. Seymour went to a house at Albert Gate. They had each their own circle of friends, who came and went freely. Between the years 1850-74, he was acquainted more or less intimately with Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, James Rice, Edwin Arnold, Wilberforce,

Robert Buchanan, Victor. Hugo, Bulwer-Lytton, Thackeray and Miss Hogarth, Mrs. Oliphant, Rhoda Broughton, Mrs. Bancroft, Kate and Ellen Terry, Mrs. Kendal, Irving, Toole, Wilson Barrett and many others of note—not least his collaborateur, Dion Boucicault.

It was wonderful how much he retained of the freshness and sprightliness of boyhood. He always had a very deep sympathy with every real experience of life, in child or man. He had much in common with his favourite *Doctor Amboyne** and certainly possessed to a peculiar degree that gentleman's capacity for putting himself in the place of others.

At sixty-two, he was in heart and manner still comparatively young. But in 1878, Mrs. Seymour's health, which had been somewhat uncertain for a long time, failed entirely, and in '79 she died.

The strongest love of his life had been centred on this woman, and when she died his own life left nearly him. It seemed as though he *could not* look up again and go on living in a world where there was no Laura to welcome him, to look into his eyes with understanding, to cheer him with her own bright spirit. Only those of his relations who were with him during those awful weeks knew approximately what he passed through. He did recover to a certain extent, but his heart's action remained irregular.

Further residence in the Albert Gate house was impossible to him, and he and his brother Compton rented two semi-detached villas near London. Gradually some amount of interest in life returned to the broken-hearted author. He was carefully tended by nephews and nieces, and his old love for animals reawoke in him: he had quite a little colony of Belgian hares running fearlessly about the lawn and fraternizing with a pair of toy-terriers.

In the summer of 1881, there was a grand family gathering in the old hall at Ipsden, on the occasion of Henry becoming the head of the family. Charles Reade was there; a fine venerable-looking figure, with his long white beard and hair. He seemed to many quite to have got over the shock of Mrs. Seymour's death, and some even prophesied that he would live to old age. He actually played a game of tennis.

* In "Put Yourself in His Place."

But the excitement attendant on the production of a drama, "Love and Money"—the first literary effort since his loss, and made sorely against the grain—brought back irritability, loss of sleep and many unfavourable symptoms.

To escape the English fogs he went to Cannes, but grew slowly worse, and when his brother Henry died suddenly, the fresh shock completely prostrated him. He was literally brought home to die.

On Good Friday, 1884, Charles Reade, "dramatist, novelist, journalist," passed away.

PART II.

THE works of Charles Reade have been so far put on one side. They demand separate consideration.

They differ widely in style and purpose. If "Christie Johnstone" and "Put Yourself in His Place" were read together and without knowledge of the author's name, it would be difficult to think of them as children of the same brain.

Yet the hall-mark, as it were, is there in the essentially dramatic treatment of the subjects. In all, from "The Cloister and the Hearth" and "Peg Woffington" to "Singleheart and Doubleface" and "A Double Marriage," there is the hand of the dramatist in plot, character and situation. Indeed to such an extent was this bent followed that it has even damaged some of his work in the eyes of at least one famous critic.

In a prologue to a rustic story Reade wrote: "Pen in hand I am fond of hot passions and pictorial incidents, and, like the historians, care too little for the 'middle of humanity ;'" and no one can read his books without recognizing the justice of at least the first part of this remark.

It is possible to roughly classify his books.

"Peg Woffington," "Christie Johnstone," "The Wandering Heir," and one or two others are not only dramatic in treatment but also in form. Action, action, all through. A series of moving pictures with not a word of explanation beyond what is needful to indicate the scene. The characters reveal themselves as in life by acting, speaking and *looking*; the dialogue is terse, sparkling, stimulating.

You are planted in the very atmosphere of the scenes. In Peg Woffington" you feel all the artificial splendour and illusion

of stage life ; in "Christie Johnstone" you catch the glinting of the sunlight on the silver fish and hear the rough shouts of the Newhaven men hauling in the nets.

Charles Reade wished to be thought, and considered himself primarily, a dramatist. He *saw* every incident from a dramatic point of view. His puppets verily played their part on a stage : and every grouping of them, every motion, every word spoken by them was studied. He knew the position, the expression, the tone, the very light needful to bring out the greatest amount of meaning, and he has transferred this visual creation almost entire to his novels in a way that few have done at all and none quite on his ground.

The success of that magnificent trio, "It is Never Too Late to Mend," "Hard Cash," "Put Yourself in His Place," is a standing refutation of the arguments of those who carp at "novels with a purpose."

"I will make people feel," he said. "They read of an occasional outrage in asylum or prison, say 'how shocking,' and forget all about it. I will bring it home to them : they shall *feel* : they shall see how these facts may touch them individually."

And he took firm hold of the facts—prison cruelties, inadequacy of lunacy laws, the brutal and intolerably selfish elements that exist in trade unions, made them integral parts of the stories, and so brought home to the vast novel-reading public the things that were being done in secret.

Of course there is a danger in such novels that the details should be uninteresting : that the story be cut to fit a theory : that the characters be dominated by a system, and undue prominence be given to one influence ; but Reade has fallen into none of these errors. His books show life as he has seen it, as he sees it might affect certain people ; and in choosing those situations where the evil effects could be most clearly seen and above all *felt* by the public he has but given evidence of his own consummate art.

Life as he has seen it. There lies another secret of his power. He never wrote of anything from hearsay. He would spend weeks, months, travelling, watching, classifying facts. If he could see for himself he would, no matter what it cost him. If this were impossible he would get hold of some one who *had* seen, and learn what he wanted to know direct from their lips. The

pirate's chase in "Hard Cash," the hopes and fears, the perils, the descriptions of the gold-diggings in "It is Never Too Late to Mend," were learnt in this way. Of the painful details of prison, asylum, and trades unions cruelties he had been an eye-witness.

Those three books form a class quite distinct from the purely dramatic. "A Woman Hater" should perhaps be included, as it contains the history of Rhoda Gale, and is therefore a cry against injustice, though in other respects it comes far behind them.

"A Perilous Secret," "Love me Little, Love me Long," "A Double Marriage," and "A Terrible Temptation," are all of one stamp, though here, again, the last is some way behind the others in merit; and a fourth class is made by "The Autobiography of a Thief," "Good Stories of Men and Animals" and "The Course of True Love Never did run Smooth."

Two books stand alone:

"The Cloister and the Hearth" and "Griffith Gaunt."

The first has become a standard work. As a study of the customs of the 15th century in Holland, Germany, France and Italy, it is unsurpassed, perhaps untouched. The powerful grip Reade has of his subject, the way in which he has seen all with the "inner eye," the divorce he has effected between his work and his own century and conditions of life, so that when you read the book, you are living in *Gerard's* times and in the thought of his day and country; all these, with his dramatic force and his consummate insight into human nature, have combined in the building up of this masterpiece. As long as novels are read, Charles Reade will be known as the author of "The Cloister and the Hearth."

The publication of "Griffith Gaunt" was the culminating point in his literary career. The book elicited more abuse than any other of his. Everything that spite and calumny, envy and prudery could invent was showered on him; one result was a run on the book, which paid his debts and left him a handsome sum, freeing him for the rest of his life from money difficulties. The utter injustice of the attack roused his indignation, and a considerable correspondence was conducted through the press; but he was greatly soothed and pleased by a letter of appreciation and warm sympathy which he received from Sir Edwin Arnold.

It is impossible in a short paper to attempt anything like a criticism of his books. As so much has been written lately on the methods of writing fiction, a few words on that of Charles Reade may be interesting.

His commonplace-books are renowned. Therein he noted everything that could possibly be useful to him, whether the details were of scenery, conversation, sentiment, character, situation or event. One bulky volume he read when studying for "Hard Cash" was so ill-arranged that he cut it up, pasting the cuttings all over a large screen, arranging them to suit himself.

He never wrote for less than five hours a day; and never worked on Sundays, no matter how pressed for time.

"When the ardour of research is on, the ardour of writing is extinct," he wrote to Laura Seymour, and at those times he almost lived in the Oxford libraries. Twice he confesses to being moved to tears over scenes in his books. Once he writes in doubt of the plot of "The Cloister and The Hearth," but says: "There shall be great and tremendous and tender things in it!" and was he not capable of carrying out his resolve?

He had many difficulties with publishers; many battles to fight for the copyright of his plays; many bitter, cruel attacks to endure from critics; this is the spirit in which he answered:

"A man who steps out of the beaten track in every way as I do, must expect greater difficulties than other people. The question whether I can overcome them or not is not yet settled. When I produce another 'It is Never Too Late to Mend,' and cabal succeed in burking it, then I will give in. Not before."

The judgments (*sic*) of newspaper reviewers are a by-word for absurdity, and have not much improved since his day. They denounced "It is Never Too Late to Mend," as "verging on the confines of farce;" but reserved for to-day the discriminating statement, "this book must be read to be understood!"

Charles Reade, however, was his own severest critic. He knew well what was good in his work and did not despair, though "Sera Nunquam" (the drama on which was founded "It is Never Too Late to Mend") failed for seven years to gain a hearing on any stage; he also knew what was bad, and cut out remorselessly any passage that offended his taste or that failed in truth.

Once he wrote, "Wait till I get to London and organize a

little society of painters, actors, and writers, all lovers of truth, and sworn to stand or fall together. Why not a Truth Company as well as a Gala Company?—*l'un vaut bien que l'autre*. There is, I believe, a company and a steam engine for everything except truth."

This principle he advocates on behalf of acting in "Peg Woffington," of painting in "Christie Johnstone," of music in several books; and himself exemplifies it in literature.

Of trades-unions he wrote: "If you want a grain of humanity, or honour, or justice, or manly feeling of any kind, don't go to a trades-union." Though the words are strong their truth was certainly borne out by what he had seen and known of their working in his own day in the north. "Put Yourself in His Place" was his last great novel. The pen that had drawn *Francis Eden* had lost none of its power and charm, deep sympathy and delightful humour when it drew *Dr. Amboyne*.

Reade's women have a family likeness, though in what it consists it is difficult to say. They are the best that is implied in the word "feminine:" refined, pure-hearted, gentle, graceful, soft and generally also slightly *piquante*. Feminine caprice, waywardness, inconsistency between feeling and speech, unexpected nobility side by side with unsuspected pettiness—all this he has caught and transferred to paper with wonderful insight, humour and tenderness.

By far the greater number of his novels appeared on the stage as dramas.

"Spoken words are signs of thought, written words are signs of such signs," he wrote, and the exceeding naturalness of the dialogue is no doubt in great measure the direct outcome of his desire for the test of actual utterance. The numerous short tales which, under the title of "Good Stories of Men and Animals," he from time to time contributed to "Belgravia," will all bear being read aloud. Of how small a proportion of the generality of tales can this be said!

If one had space one would like to transcribe several passages from his less-known writings. The following four, are, however, of peculiar interest, and may be quoted at length.

The first was written when the attack on "Sera Nunquam" was hottest.

"Prejudice is a giant, against whom truth and humanity need

to be defended with great spirit, and in some desperate cases with a tiger-like ferocity." . . . Again :

"I feign probabilities ; I record improbabilities : the former are conjectures, the latter truths : mixed they make a thing not so true as gospel nor so false as history : viz., fiction."

The next, from "A Terrible Temptation," recalls his sister Julia and her care of "Charley :"

"Compton . . . never knew the thorns with which the path of letters is oft bestrewn. A mistress of the great art of pleasing made knowledge from the first a primrose path to him. Sparkling all over with intelligence she impregnated her boy with it. She made herself his favourite companion ; she would not keep her distance. She stole and coaxed knowledge and goodness into his heart and mind with rare and loving cunning."

In this last we know to whom he paid tribute :

"A story ought to end with a marriage : ought it not ? Well, this one does not, because there are reasons which compel the author to tell the truth. The poet did not marry the actress and beget tragedies and comedies. Love doesn't always end in marriage even behind the scenes of a theatre. But it led to a result the value of which my old writers know and my young ones will learn—it led to a very tender and life-long friendship. And oh ! how few out of the great aggregate of love affairs lead to so high, or so good, or so affectionate a permanency as is a tender friendship."

The actor, Henry Neville, asserted that Charles Reade's pen issued "words of fire for all things false and base ;" his readers know also that they were no less glowing for all things great and tender.

The Abbot's Secret.

IN September, 1537, the dissolution of the abbey and monastery so long established at Tintern, in Monmouthshire, was ordered by Henry VIII. The monks were expelled, and the abbot commanded to deliver up the abbey seal, all deeds, plate and inventories. Great was the rage and disappointment of the royal commissioners when they were told the inventories had been accidentally burnt some years before, and that the altar vessels and furnishings were of base metal or brass, the reliquaries even being copper, gilt, set with false stones. As all jewels and plate were to be reserved for the king, this fact caused great indignation among the officials, and the abbot was roughly questioned many times, being threatened with death or imprisonment if it was ascertained he had concealed treasures; but he explained he had only been elected abbot a few months and knew nothing of the inventories, but he regretted their loss, as they would prove the abbey had never possessed valuables of any kind for many centuries. After a long and fruitless examination, he was told to depart, and one of the commission being a relative, he was permitted to take the choir book he had presented as a dedication gift to the abbey. From the port of Bristol he sailed for Wexford, and sought refuge with the prior of the Benedictine monastery, where he remained till his death some months after his arrival. His last act was to rebind the choir book and present it to the library of the monastery. These are all the facts known of the last abbot of Tintern Abbey, but some strange occurrences which took place in an old house near the ruins some thirty years back, lead us to the conclusion that Abbot Wych possessed a secret which was to remain hidden for nearly three hundred years, and the whole circumstances are so extraordinary that the account given below is well worth the consideration of those who study and are interested in psychical research.

In the year 1869, the iron works which were established at Tintern soon after 1537 were removed to Portskewit, and the workmen's cottages were allowed to fall into ruins after being

dismantled, but one more important dwelling, which, though in a bad state of repair, was still habitable, was left untouched. In 1600, this had been the residence of one of the proprietors of the iron works, and it continued for many generations in the possession of the same family, till changes of fortune caused them to sell the house, after a fire had destroyed half of it, then it at once became the residence of the managers of the foundries, and when another fifty years had still further deteriorated its appearance, overseers were placed in it who lived and sometimes died there. In 1869 it was decided by the company to remove the works to another part of the country. The last overseer had gone from the house two months, and the inhabitants of Tintern Parva were speculating over its fate, when, to the surprise of all, it found a tenant in Mrs. Herbert, who with her two daughters offered to rent it. She was the widow of a Bristol bookseller, and had during the last year passed through much tribulation, for her husband, possessing the tastes of an antiquarian and being a visionary man, had filled his shop with works quite unsuited to the requirements of the present generation. After a struggle, protracted over many years, the end came at last. Everything had to be sold, which so afflicted the poor old man that he did not long survive the change in his circumstances, and very soon after his death, Mrs. Herbert, hearing Abbey House was to be had at a very low rent, decided to take it, and try if she could live there with her daughters on a small annuity secured to her of £40 a year. In the June quarter of 1869, the small family moved in and settled themselves in Tintern Parva. Abbey House, though in its decadence, was still somewhat superior to the houses near it. Viewed from the front it had the appearance of a large cottage which had seen better days, but looking at it after passing a few yards up the road, a side wing built of stone was disclosed, in which could be seen two beautiful Early Gothic windows, without glass certainly, but with the stone mullions and tracery very perfect; there was a large garden also, beyond it, in which sheds and outbuildings covered with ivy were visible, and a magnificent old chestnut tree shaded the wide terrace walk under the wing. Ancient fruit trees and bushes bordered the path that led to the river bank, where, just below the water, stone steps could be seen, and the foundations for massive piers. Tourists and strangers always made eager inquiries about the

house and asked why the brick front had been added to the stone wing, but no one in the village seemed inclined to answer these questions. All they would or could say was, that they called it Abbey House, because it was near the old abbey, and it was built hundreds of years ago for some great nobleman who owned the iron works; the house had then a large picture gallery and a banquet hall, but a fire broke out one September and burnt all the mansion except the wing now left, and after that, managers and overseers were put in. Then perhaps the narrator would add, "We knows it is haunted! and we never goes a-near it after twilight whatever!" and no amount of questioning could get an explanation of these mysterious sentences. Mrs. Herbert found out before she had been a month in the house that none of the villagers would come near them after dark, and tales were told her in "strict confidence" of figures often seen in the garden, and that in the month of September lights wandered between the house and the ruined abbey.

Mrs. Herbert listened, but she smiled slightly, and refused to credit any of the ghostly stories told her. After many months of anxiety she had found a resting-place, the house and rent suited her small income, and she determined no rumours of shadowy appearances should cause her to abandon her present home.

At this period the family were living in the cottage front, which consisted of two large parlours and two bedrooms over, to which access was given by a door in one corner of the inner room; the outer was entered from the garden through the porch, and another door opposite it led into a passage below the wing and to the kitchens. A noble stone staircase led to the wing, richly carved once, but now much broken. Ascending this about twenty steps, a landing and wide archway appeared, and through the last was seen a long gallery, the end of which was circular and lighted by three long lancet-shaped windows. Two of these were boarded up, and the third gave very little light, as paper had been pasted over at least half of it when the glass had been broken or had fallen out. The walls were whitewashed, and on one side were the two windows which could be seen from the road. They were fitted with frames canvassed over, as a defence against the weather, and their beauty could only be guessed at by the pointed carved tops seen above the woodwork. For

many years the long gallery had served as a lumber room for the occupants of the house. Even now it was covered with straw, bits of boxes, rags of carpet and rubbish of all sorts ; it could not have been properly cleared out for generations. Under the lancet windows stood an old chest about six feet long, without a lid. It was screwed to the floor and clamped to the wall. It had evidently served as a convenient receptacle for useless articles of every description, the quantity and worthless nature of which had prevented time or money being spent on their removal. The chest was full now and overflowing. On the walls still remained marks of where a partition had once divided the gallery and a low arched doorway led into three small rooms at the top of the staircase. The kitchens were part of the old mansion with vaulted roofs and fan-tracery ornamentation. The large fireplaces had been bricked up and the size of the windows reduced. These and the gallery were all that remained of the ancient building. Outside in the garden was an archway, under the lancet window, which had long ago been blocked up, leaving space only for a small bench. A few ruined sheds with Tudor Gothic openings for air and light, and a second beautiful stone archway leading into the outer kitchen, were all that now remained of former grandeur.

It was usual in Tintern Parva village to take lodgers for the summer months and fishing season, so that Mrs. Herbert, after consulting her daughters (for they kept no servant), thought she would do so too, and advertised in one of the London papers. She quickly received three replies. One of them she thought might suit ; it was written from the Mitre Hotel, Oxford. A gentleman named Prior and his son wished to make their headquarters in the fishing district of the Wye. They would probably remain only a few days at a time at the Abbey House as they intended to make tours in the neighbourhood, and go and return as suited them. They offered £1 a week for two months certain. It was quite natural that a provisional acceptance of these gentlemen should be sent off by that night's post, and Mrs. Herbert decided that the cottage part of the house should be given up to the lodgers, and she and her daughters arranged to take for themselves the three rooms over the kitchens next to the long gallery. Marion, the elder girl, suggested it "would be a good time to clear it out, so that they could use it as a sitting-room ;"

but Lucy, the younger and more delicate sister, exclaimed, "It would take months to get rid of all the rubbish, and it was a man's work to clean it!" Mrs. Herbert smiled on both, and reminded them that only the strictest economy would allow her to pay for the furniture necessary to furnish the bedrooms, but there would be no objection to turning out the long gallery presently and well cleaning it, as it would make a convenient place for exercise in wet weather.

The day after it was settled to take the Priors, Mrs. Herbert paid a long visit to the rector of Tintern, Mr. Courtenay, to ask his opinion and consult him as to the propriety of requesting references from Mr. Prior, who had not offered any. The rector advised her to write and request a small payment in advance, and all were satisfied when, in answer to a rather timid inquiry on the subject, a letter came inclosing a £5 note for a month's payment.

The next few days were busy ones, and it was a relief to all when the afternoon came that brought a tall grey-haired man and his stout young son of twenty-five in a fly from Chepstow. They had very little luggage with them, if we except a large bundle of wraps and a great display of fishing tackle. Mr. Prior seemed charmed with the quarters offered them, and thanked his hostess for taking so much trouble to make them comfortable. In a very short time they had settled down to enjoy country life in a small village. They had tickets to fish in the preserved waters, and the father with his son walked out every morning in a different direction, sometimes with fishing rods, but more often without.

A very few days after their arrival they had heard all that Mrs. Herbert could tell them about Abbey House and its surroundings, and had examined with the greatest attention every part of the old building inside and out.

Mr. Prior spent hours in the evening talking to Lucy in the garden while she tied up her roses and pinks, or watered the large geraniums in pots, placed each side of the terrace walk, he smoking and observing all around him during the time.

At nine o'clock the cottage part of the house was left in possession of the gentlemen, and the door of communication locked, everything requisite being placed in the parlour that might be required before morning, then the mother and daughters

went up to their rooms in the wing. Mrs. Herbert and Lucy had the inner room and Marion slept alone in the one that opened into the gallery. For the first few nights after the change she fell asleep quickly, only waking in the early morning, but after about a week it became a custom to wake suddenly as if some noise had disturbed her; then she would sit up in bed and listen, but she only heard the mice scuttling behind the wainscot or the wind rattling through the boarded-up windows outside her door. In a few moments she would lie down again and think of the occult books she had read in her father's shop, and wonder how much truth and how much imagination helped to make up the volumes written on such subjects, and how *she* would feel if she became herself the subject of a spiritual manifestation such as were described in books she had read. One night waking as usual with a start, and the night feeling hot and sultry, she rose and walked to the window. All looked lovely outside in the moonlight and she drew a chair towards her and sat down. Her eyes wandered over the river to the hills beyond it, then fell on the garden below, and it was with a shock of surprise she saw a tall figure in white on the walk under her window. She watched it a few moments and then it seemed to melt into the mist of the river near the archway beneath the lancet windows. She recovered herself in a few moments and thought it was a hallucination; then feeling a strange sleepiness steal over her she returned to her bed, and only woke late in the morning when her mother called her and asked her to dress quickly, for she was going to Chepstow market with Lucy and there was much to see to before they could start. Marion was soon in the kitchen preparing breakfast for the lodgers, and when she carried it in Mr. Prior was standing before the little hanging book-shelves, and turning as she entered, said:

"Who reads translations from 'Swedenborg's Life and Writings'?" and I see 'Home on Spiritualism' and 'Kane on Mesmerism,' and M. M. H. is written in one. Are they yours, young lady?"

"Yes," answered the girl; "they are old books my father said I might have. Do you understand mesmerism? I have always wished to make that power mine to use for the alleviation of suffering. Do you believe there *is* such a power?"

"It is far too large a subject to enter on now, my dear young

lady," and replacing the book Mr. Prior walked towards Marion, fixing his eyes on her and saying :

"But why did you leave the bird-cage on the breakfast table this morning?"

With a start of astonishment she looked and saw on the middle of the cloth the cage with her canary hopping about in it, but as she rushed forward to remove it, Mr. Prior (still fixing his eyes on her) said :

"Oh, no! there is no cage on the table; it hangs as usual in the window; it must have been the reflection of the sun on the cloth." He quickly pulled down the blind, adding, "You see, I am right."

Feeling rather bewildered, but sure she had been mistaken, Marion gave her mother's message that she and Lucy were going to Chepstow, and asked what orders Mr. Prior had to give about his dinner. To divert her mind from the incident of the bird-cage he said he and his son would be out all day, as they were going to Ross, but if Mrs. Herbert could kindly bring back any letters waiting for them from the post office it would much oblige them; then he added :

"Are you not afraid of being left alone in the house all day?"

"Oh, no!" answered Marion; "I have too much to do to think about being alone, and I shall not have finished till it is nearly time for mother to be back again."

And so it turned out. The clock had struck four and it was a quarter after before she had changed her gown and was taking a well-earned rest in the high-backed armchair which she dragged into the archway of the kitchen door, and in which she lay back comfortably watching the birds and fleecy clouds, and certainly slept for a few moments till she was roused by the sound of footsteps, and then a voice, which said :

"Do not be startled. We found it so hot when we had walked half-way to Ross,* that my son proposed we should dine at a village inn and come back again and solace ourselves with a cigar under the shade of the trees by the river."

Marion had started up from her chair at the first word of Mr. Prior's sentence, and answered quickly :

"I am so glad you have returned; now you can tell me more on the subject we touched on this morning. I am most anxious to know something about mesmerism and its power. I hope

my mother will allow me presently to be a hospital nurse, and then I might be able to use it as an aid to medicine if I could acquire the gift of soothing my patients."

With a smile Mr. Prior drew near, saying: "Have you ever seen a person mesmerized? But I suppose not, as you ask for information. Mesmerism is a most useful agent if properly applied, and is able to give blessed relief to suffering humanity; but no one but a strong medium who sympathizes with the sufferer can use it with good effect. But does your mother approve of your studies in this direction?" and then he continued abruptly: "At what time do you expect her home from Chepstow?"

"My mother," answered Marion, "does not quite like me inquiring into these strange "uncanny" things, as she calls them, but she has never forbidden me to continue my studies of the supernatural. I expect she will be back to tea by half-past five."

Mr. Prior lighted a cigar, and after a few minutes of thoughtful silence observed:

"I can tell you wonderful things in connection with this subject, but before I can do so I should like to ascertain if you possess any power as a medium, or if your power is worth developing. To do this I must try if it is possible to put you into the trance state, or, as you would say, if you can be mesmerized. Are you willing to try? Here comes my son with his sketch-book; he shall move your chair a little under the archway in the garden," and then he said to Marion, who had eagerly jumped up and helped to move her chair, "Now sit down! You are not afraid?"

"No!" she replied, "not afraid of being mesmerized, but afraid I may not be a good subject, and your efforts to influence my mind may not be successful."

"Do not think of anything in particular, my dear young lady. Now lean back in your chair, fix your eyes on mine while I make the passes, so; that is well."

Marion had raised her head and fixed her eyes on Mr. Prior's, who moved his hands slowly up and down towards her, and after a few minutes her whole frame quivered and she half started up out of her seat, but with a stern, "Sleep, at once!" from the mesmerist she fell back, her eyes closed, and she appeared per-

fectly unconscious. For a second or two Mr. Prior kept his eyes fixed on her face, still continuing the passes; then he advanced and raised the eyelids and examined the eyes; they were fixed and blind to all outward objects.

"Bryan, come here," were his next words. "Have you the prior's letter he gave me to aid our search? You must take down all she says. We are indeed fortunate in finding a trance medium on the spot to help us; she is possibly also *clairvoyante*," and, taking the girl's hand in his own and placing his other hand on her forehead, Mr. Prior addressed her:

"Marion Herbert, can you follow my thoughts? Tell me who I am! where I came from! and why!"

A struggle seemed to take place in Marion's mind; her lips moved quickly but no sound came, and her hands opened and shut convulsively.

"I *order* you to speak!" commanded the mesmerist. "Tell me who I am and where I come from!"

"You are a secret agent of a powerful society, and were once a choir boy at Wexford Benedictine Monastery," was the reply, given in a hollow unnatural voice which seemed to proceed from the lips of no living person, so white and expressionless appeared the face in the shadow of the archway.

"Why am I here?"

"You seek a treasure hidden by ——."

"Quick! give me the abbot's paper, Bryan!" and loosing the hand he had held, he placed in it a fragment of yellow paper, which seemed to have been pasted on the cover of a book. Holding it in Marion's hand, Mr. Prior asked: "Can you read this?"

She raised it to her forehead and held it there, and then the monotonous voice read: "I, Richard Wych, last Abbot of Tintern, saved the property of the Church from the hand of the spoiler by concealing it in the chamber of the 'penitent,' under the altar in my private chapel; seek it!"

"Where?" again questioned Mr. Prior, as the voice ceased.

"I cannot say, there is no more writing! All has gone from me! Wait! Ask me another day! My thoughts are troubled! I see an old man writing and fixing his letter on the inside of his missal cover, then concealing it among the other books in the monastery library. Let me wake! I can do no more!"

At this moment the noise of the wheels of the pony-cart were heard on the road, and Bryan exclaimed :

"Wake her, sir, for God's sake ! or we shall be caught. Here come the mother and sister."

Quickly removing his hand from the forehead of the girl, Mr. Prior made with both hands the reversed passes over Marion's face and body, and threw the whole of his magnetic strength into his action and voice as he said in a tone of authority :

"Wake instantly ! and forget——"

For a few seconds both men hardly breathed, so intense was their anxiety that Marion should recover consciousness ; it was with a sigh of relief that they watched her eyes slowly unclosed and her body start into active life again.

As she sat up, Mr. Prior stepped quickly back to the side of her chair and Marion exclaimed :

"There ! you see what a bad subject I am. I tried my best to sleep, but could not ; the lapping of the water against the bank disturbed my mind. I am so sorry, but I hope you will try me again ; one failure will not discourage me. Oh ! dear ! how tired I feel. I can hardly move. Why, mother and Lucy are coming down the path ! How strange ! for I heard no carriage wheels. Excuse me, I must go and help bring in the marketing. Lucy is calling me," and Marion passed while speaking through the kitchen archway.

After a pause Bryan observed :

"We are well out of that, father ; better luck next time. There is no doubt Father Ambrose is right, and when he found the abbot's book with the double binding which concealed the paper he gave you, he hit the truth when he said the search must be carried on at Tintern Abbey in England, not at the abbey of the same name in Ireland. You must try the girl again or give it up. We shall not get much out of it even if we find the hoard of the old abbot. We have been here three weeks fooling about without result, and we may be called away any day to give the *séance* at Scarborough our agent was to arrange for us—it will not do to neglect the substance for the shadow, father."

"You are a very wise and prudent young man," answered Mr. Prior, stooping to pick up the yellow paper that had

fluttered from Marion's hand as she rose; "but, remember, we are only allowed to practise our 'profession' (shall we call it?) on the one condition that we assist our Mother Church by its aid, if required. We shall surely be reminded of it if we attempt to break faith, and should we succeed we shall be well paid. But you are right: I am rather sick of prowling about in the dark or at early dawn playing the monk. I must confess I was a little scared last night in the garden. I felt sure I saw a figure on the terrace walk, but it was only the mist from the river; approaching it I saw quite plainly the arch under the gallery which had seemed to me a minute before to be a tall shape in white. I do not suppose it possible that any one else is after the abbot's hidings, or I should have thought there were 'two Richmonds in the field.' Ha! ha! but see! there is our landlady coming towards us."

So saying, Mr. Prior and his son entered the kitchen and met Mrs. Herbert, who gave them two letters and the information that high tea was ready in the parlour. When the letters were opened their contents changed the plans laid out by the lodgers for the next week. One was from the agent at Scarborough, telling them the *seance* was fixed for the next week, and from Brighton came a request—almost a command—from Lady Maud asking for their presence at a drawing-room meeting at her house, to which she had invited a large party of friends to witness the marvellous gifts possessed by Mr. Prior and his son; inclosed was a cheque for £50.

An animated discussion took place over these letters, and when it was concluded the Priors went in search of Mrs. Herbert, whom they found in the kitchen exhibiting her purchases to Marion, and the little family party experienced a shock of astonishment when the announcement was made to them that important business called their lodgers away before five next morning. They must catch the first train to London at Chepstow and would breakfast there. No one was to get up to see them off. After accounts were settled, promises were made by Mr. Prior that they would speedily return and write frequently; then "good-nights" and "good-byes" were exchanged, and with much hand-shaking all round the father and son returned to their rooms to finish their interrupted meal, and after it to pack their bags with necessary articles for a week, leaving

the rest of their luggage directed, so that it could be sent to an address in London if necessary.

* * * * *

The night after the Priors left, Marion woke as usual just before dawn, and feeling a cool air pass over her face, imagined she must have forgotten to fasten her door securely. Without waiting to light her candle she felt her way to it. As her hand touched the handle it fell open and she became aware that the whole gallery was filled with a luminous mist, through which all objects were distinctly visible. Advancing a step to see if it came through the broken windows she was suddenly arrested and unable to move; turning her head towards the end where the windows were situated, she saw (or imagined she saw), in the place of the old chest, a high altar covered with a white embroidered cloth; on it were placed tall candles, vases of flowers, silver vessels, and in the centre a crucifix; above all, on a bracket, a large figure of the Virgin, and in front, on his knees, an old man dressed in white, whom she vaguely seemed to recognize. As she looked on him he disappeared, shadowy forms passed her and she felt the air displaced as they advanced towards the altar, on reaching which each pair laid something they had carried between them on the lowest step. They knelt at the sides, and in a moment the altar slowly moved along the wall, and as Marion gazed, faded or became absorbed in the surrounding mist, which gradually clearing away, the old chest became visible, and the tall lancet windows above it. Then that strange feeling of sleepiness fell over her, and some power impelled her with quite resistless force into her room, where she was placed on her bed and slept heavily till morning.

Marion Herbert being a child of an intellectual visionary, it was necessary, to keep nature's balance even, that she should be endowed with the gift of practicality, and therefore, though she vaguely sought books treating of the spirit world, she read them not to gratify an ignorant pleasure found in reading blood-curdling narrations, but with the view of ascertaining if the powers written of could be employed to benefit any one. This practical method of treating the information she acquired was the means of relieving her mind of those fears experienced by the ignorant and superstitious. So that when, on waking, her thoughts turned to the vision of the night, she sought to find a

key to it and a reason why such a circumstance should have occurred to her, feeling strongly that there was a purpose in it which she was to find out. After some reflection she determined on taking the first step, which should be the cleaning and clearing out of the long gallery. On joining her mother and Lucy at breakfast she proposed that as their lodgers had left for a week or two and there was much less work, it would be a very good time to turn out the long gallery. "We can get in Mrs. Marshall, mother, to help Lucy and me," she said; "she is a very strong, capable woman. We will run down to the cottage and secure her for the afternoon. You, dear mother, are to sit in the porch with your knitting; we will surprise you by tea-time with a new clean room."

By four o'clock that day the washing and scrubbing of the gallery was in vigorous progress, and at half-past Mrs. Marshall came downstairs, hot and dusty, saying she must now go home and get her children's tea. The young ladies would not want her again till next morning, as there was not very much more to be done. All was cleared out except the old chest. After paying her, Mrs. Herbert put down her work, and thinking the girls might like tea soon went towards the kitchen to see about it. As she opened the parlour door a crash and loud exclamations met her ear. Much frightened, she ran up the stairs into the gallery, and at first could see no one, the dust was rising in such thick clouds from the end of it, under the windows. Advancing hurriedly, she perceived Lucy holding Marion's hands and trying to pull her out of the old chest. When she reached them they told her there was not much the matter, no one was hurt, but Marion had jumped into the chest to clean it out quicker, and part of the bottom broke away with a loud noise, and she fell through, but not far, as a ledge on which her feet rested had stopped her. It felt like a step, she said, and she believed there were more underneath. Would her mother fetch a light while they threw out the rest of the rubbish and examined? In a very few moments the girls had cleared away enough to show, after the decayed splinters of wood were removed, that there were stone steps beneath, and, tucking her dress closely round her, Marion squeezed herself again into the hole and carefully crept down them, feeling her way with hands and feet. She had to stop once or twice, as the dust she stirred up in her descent

nearly choked her, and she had to keep constantly assuring her mother there was no danger. When she had nearly disappeared she held out her hand for the lamp, and Mrs. Herbert and her youngest daughter held each other's hands tightly while both entreated her not to be too venturesome, or stay below longer than a few moments. They soon heard knocking and thumping on a hard substance, and then Marion's voice as she came back again telling them there was an iron-bound door at the bottom, tightly fastened up or locked, but there was no lock or keyhole, and she had found it quite impossible to move it. Lucy then suggested that the best plan would be to send and inform Mr. Courtenay, the rector, of their discovery, as he had always been so interested in examining the old wing, and had once or twice speculated that it had been the summer residence of Tintern's abbot. Marion seconded Lucy's suggestion, and the latter was soon walking quickly to the Rectory; but she was warned by her mother to tell no one she might meet on the way, or the whole village would come to "help or hinder," said Marion.

While waiting for Mr. Courtenay, Marion gave her mother an account of her dream (she called it) of the night before, and her impression that something was to be found out in the neighbourhood of the gallery, and now she felt sure they were on the track of a secret, and were to be the means of bringing some hidden deed to the light of day. She only trusted it would not turn out to be anything dreadful, such as a murder and the discovery of the victim's body. The village would gossip if that turned out to be the case, and they would never come into the house or near it, that was quite certain. Meanwhile mother and daughter busied themselves taking out the remaining fragments from the old chest, and when, in less than half-an-hour, Lucy returned with the rector all was ready for his investigation. He was intensely interested in the discovery of the concealed stair, and pulled off his coat while Marion held the lamp, by the aid of which he proceeded to enlarge the opening in the inside of the chest. When this was done twenty stone steps could be counted, and the iron-plated door, without bolt or lock, seen. In a few moments Mr. Courtenay had gone down and stood before it. He thumped, pressed against it with all his strength, but it was quite immovable. A very heavy iron ring hung about a foot from the top, and although it could be pulled

up and down did not appear to have any connection with the door fastening ; it weighed quite four pounds, and after twirling it about for a few minutes Mr. Courtenay decided it was a useless attempt at rough ornamentation, and requested Mrs. Herbert to give him her heaviest hammer and he would try to break open the door. While she was seeking it he remained waiting at the top of the steps talking to Lucy. Marion, meantime, who had carried the candle, stood beside the door they could not open, and amused herself by throwing the light upon the walls here and there, and then taking the ring in her hand she wondered for what purpose it had been placed in that position, till hearing her mother's voice she let it slip suddenly from her fingers, when immediately there was a loud clash followed by a noise of something falling, and the door opened so suddenly that Marion only just saved herself from being precipitated into the opening by catching hold of the post next her ; the candle, falling from her hand, was extinguished. Hearing the clash made by the falling of the ring, also Marion's stumble and low cry, Mr. Courtenay ran quickly down to her, calling to Lucy to bring matches or another light. A lamp was soon passed down to him, and relighting the candle both entered through the now wide-open door into a vaulted chamber, which was like a crypt below an old church. It felt cold, but not damp ; air evidently found ingress somewhere ; the walls were covered with rudely painted frescoes representing scenes from the Old and New Testaments. At one end was a large crucifix, before it a low stone bench, and on the opposite side a rude stone altar.

Searching carefully all round the walls several recesses disclosed themselves, which had once been concealed by iron shutters painted to match the walls ; they were now dropping to pieces. Many were only hanging by the massive locks, and rusty fragments lay scattered over the stone floor. On the shelves behind were leather bags of different sizes, much decayed, and the stitching of which having rotted away, tarnished metal of some kind appeared from the openings. When Mr. Courtenay placed his hand on the heap, and gently moved it, the entire mass suddenly collapsed, and a heap of articles rolled out from the crumbling cases in all directions. There were chalice cups, alms dishes and church plate of every kind, which it did not take long to discover as being of silver and silver-gilt

Passing on to the next recess, they found a quantity of tattered pieces of silk which covered some dingy velvet boxes, which, falling to pieces as the silk rags were displaced, disclosed two small chests with crystal sides and lids, covered with metal work of elaborate design, and thickly encrusted with stones of all colours. After gently dusting these and examining both with much attention, Mr. Courtenay pronounced them to be very ancient reliquaries, and probably of great value. Searching further they found in an arch, concealed by the stone altar, a black leather case filled with coins of all values—none later than 1536—and wrapped in a gold embroidered cope on the altar itself lay a large silver-gilt cross, bearing an inscription showing it to have been the foundation gift of William, Earl of Pembroke, to the Abbey of Tintern he built at Bannow, near Wexford. History disclosed that in 1413 it had been sent to the parent monastery in England on account of the rebels destroying the country round Bannow.

In a state of great excitement Marion returned to the bottom of the steps and informed her mother of the discovered treasures, asking for a large basket in which to bring some of them up. While waiting for this the iron-bound door and its secret contrivance for fastening it was examined. It turned out to be after all very simple. The large heavy iron ring fell on a movable plate of the same metal, and in doing so knocked away a bar which had to be adjusted from an opening beneath the chest every time the chamber was left. Very quickly a portion of the treasure was placed on the table in the parlour, and all could see it was of great value and antiquity. When the dust of ages had been softly blown off the reliquaries were found to be of gold, mounted with crystal sides, and the stones were, no doubt, jewels of value; the little heaps of dust they contained could never be identified as paper, bone or rag, and it seemed possible the relics might have been removed. The silver plate, when brought up from the crypt, consisted of every article required for the furnishing of one or two altars, and during their investigation of each piece of silver Mr. Courtenay gave most valuable information to Mrs. Herbert respecting treasure trove, and told her the Crown would probably claim all, but might, perhaps, make her a present after the value was arrived at. When the old chest was examined, experts were of the opinion that it had

once undoubtedly formed an altar, and though apparently fixed to both wall and floor, it had originally moved in a groove, and could be pushed along till the entrance to the stairs came in sight on one side. Time had obliterated all traces of the groove, but the slit, wide enough to admit the adjustment of the bolt, was seen directly the chest was removed. It was very wonderful that the stairs had never been discovered.

This story has been a long one, therefore we will not linger over all the details that arose from the circumstances of the finding of the abbot's hoard. The Crown claimed all, and Mrs. Herbert delivered it up. But after the legal difficulties had been settled with the owner of house and land, the family were presented with £150. Some of the church vessels were eventually placed in our national museum, and the others were distributed to country museums, and much was sold.

In a very short time all the antiquarians in Wales, and many from England, were flocking to the Abbey House. Every one insisted on seeing the long gallery, and even crept down into the vault, and a succession of visitors wasted hours of the Herberts' time. Added to this annoyance constant streams of letters containing requests for information arrived, which if not answered directly, were often followed by the appearance of the writers in person. Under these circumstances no one was surprised that Mrs. Herbert decided to leave at the end of her six months' tenancy.

About ten days after the discovery of the treasure a letter came from Mr. Prior. On opening it two inclosures were found—and this fact is as curious as the whole story. One was for Mrs. Herbert, and expressed great astonishment at having seen in all the papers an account of the treasure trove, and regretted that business would prevent the return to Tintern of his son and himself. The other letter in the envelope was written on thin paper to an intimate friend in France, and had evidently slipped in by some strange oversight or mistake. It gave an account of the Herbert family and of all the events of the last month, with a graphic description of Marion being placed in a trance state, and ended thus: "If I had not been a stupid owl I should have looked for the Abbot's Chapel in the gallery, instead of among the ruins in the garden." Nothing more was ever seen of the father or son, but they were

heard of as holding *séances* all over the country as electrobiologists and mesmerizers.

Two years after the Herberts left Tintern an end came to the history of Abbey House. The owners, finding it would not let, and that no one would venture near it, pulled it down and built cottages with the materials on another site. The aspect of the neighbourhood is changed in all but one respect. Near the terrace walk flourishes the old chestnut tree, and the ancient yews still show signs of vigorous life by the river bank. They serve as a landmark to a generation fast passing away, who point them out as having once flourished in the garden of the Abbots of Tintern.

A. OMAN.

No Just Cause or Impediment.

By HELEN F. HETHERINGTON,

Part Author of "PAUL NUGENT, MATERIALIST," "NO COMPROMISE,"
etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

"YOU look as pleased as Punch! What is it?" General Arbuthnot asked, as he looked over the well-stocked breakfast table at the beaming face of his wife.

Mrs. Arbuthnot raised her eyes from the letter that she was reading. "Oh, Tom, it has really come off. Milly is engaged to Jack."

"And you call *that* a matter of congratulation?" with up-lifted eyebrows.

"Don't *you*? Just what I've been hoping for, ever since Milly grew up into the darling that she is," folding up her letter and letting her mind stray through wide fields of happy possibilities.

"They ought never to be allowed to go in double harness—that's what I say," thumping the table with his fist, as if to impress the fact on his wife's mind. "Have you forgotten Ned Mainwaring, who was as mad as a hatter?"

"He fell out of a dog-cart and injured his head, but that is no reason why his nephew should do the same," placidly eating her buttered toast. "Jack's a capital whip."

"Perhaps he fell out of his cradle, and that accounted for his eccentricities at Westminster," with sarcasm that was meant to wither. "And then again, on the other side, there's Lottie Buchanan, who fancied that she had married a doctor, and was always making up pills, to save him trouble."

"Ah, but you forget; she had a dreadful illness, and the rash went in instead of coming out. Dr. Smith said that was quite enough to account for it."

"Dr. Smith was a humbug."

"I don't care about Dr. Smith," throwing him over as he proved to be no use, with true feminine celerity; "but why you are raking up all these unpleasantnesses, I can't imagine."

"Because I believe in heredity," gloomily, as he took up the *Times*.

"Do you? I don't," with a superior air, as if heredity were a third-class article of faith.

"My dear, how can you be so—absurd?" in gentle expostulation.

"Heredity does away with free will."

"Not at all. When I talk of heredity I simply mean inherited tendencies."

"Yes, tendencies which push and drive, and which no one can resist. Talk of heredity and free will. Positively ridiculous! You might as well put a man on a switchback and tell him to stop when he likes."

"Not a bit of it. The break is in our own hands, and that's where free will steps in. However, have it as you like. Ask these two young idiots down here—beslobber them with congratulatory kisses——"

"Splendid idea!" rising from her seat in a flutter of excitement. "Love-making goes on so much better in the country, and, dear things, I long to see them. I will write this very day."

"Isn't Amy Grainger coming?"

"Yes, so she is," thoughtfully. "But never mind, she can amuse you and me. She can be very agreeable, you know."

"Yes, when she likes," drily, "which isn't often."

"I think you are a little hard on her. I've an idea that she was rather fond of Jack herself," Mrs. Arbuthnot said slowly, as she locked up the tea-caddy.

"If she is, there'll be the devil to pay," grimly.

"Oh, no, no; Amy is a sensible girl, and she will look upon him as a married man."

"I fervently hope not, if what the society papers say is true."

"But it isn't, and everybody knows it, you old bird of ill omen." As she passed she gave a fond pat to her husband's bald pate, for these two were made after the old pattern of Darby and Joan—the last examples living at the end of the nineteenth century.

Miss Amy Grainger arrived with her usual punctuality, looking as neat as if she and her garments had only just been invented. Mrs. Arbuthnot put out many subtle feelers as to the state of her affections with regard to Jack Mainwaring, but Miss Grainger was as reserved as an expensive seat for which no one will find

the cash. If she liked him a little too much, she concealed it carefully, and welcomed the lovers with the utmost cordiality. Jack Mainwaring was tall and broad-shouldered, with decent features, a pleasant expression, fair hair and a frank smile; whilst Mildred Buchanan was tall and slight, with a small head, which she carried uncommonly well, and a pretty, refined face.

The general and his wife made much of them. Mildred was given the best room, and a bottle of '47 port was got out for Jack. They both seemed to be in the highest spirits, and to look upon matrimony as a blessed institution, especially invented for their own particular happiness.

One morning, when the sun was drying the dewdrops on the roses, Amy Grainger, in her pretty pink cambric, came out on to the terrace to help Jack smoke. She leant upon the balustrade in a pensive attitude, looking far into the distance, where the haze still hung over the wooded hills. Jack, who was sitting on the stone ledge, smiled as he knocked the ashes off his cigarette.

"I think I must have been born under a lucky star," he said cheerfully. "Whatever I do I fall upon my feet. See what an opening I've already got at the Bar, when other fellows, with ten times the brains that I have, are left without a brief."

"You must remind yourself of Polycrates," Amy said slowly. "What are you going to throw to the gods?"

"Nothing—till they ask for something." There was a pause, till he broke out again, as if he were so brimming over with joy and gratitude that he could not keep silent. "Then as to Mildred—such a chorus of congratulations! Everybody seemed almost as if they were as glad as we were—not one dissentient voice."

"Excuse me." Amy saw her opportunity, and pounced on it pitilessly. "How can you tell? you would be the last person to hear of any objection."

"But there are no objections," he said testily, for her remark came like a dab of cold water on the warmth of his heart. "You couldn't fabricate one if you lay awake for three weeks."

"As if I wanted to!" with an air of injured innocence. "I wish you all the happiness possible in this very contrary world."

"That's so good of you, but how about the other people?" he persisted.

"Well, if you *will* have it, they say that your relatives on both sides took odd ideas into their heads."

"That's nothing new," he interrupted quickly. "The longer I live, the odder I find my neighbours. Everybody has a craze for something or other."

"Yes ; but they are not crazy," significantly. "Think of Mr. Edward Mainwaring and that Miss Buchanan—Lottie Buchanan they called her."

Jack burst out with his hearty laugh :

"Good gracious ! I'm not to marry Milly because her great-aunt lost her head as well as her heart, and my own uncle was more or less of a fool."

"There's nothing to laugh at," Amy said crossly, disappointed at the small damage done by her bomb.

"Well, thank heaven ! there's no 'just cause or impediment,' so nobody can forbid the banns. There are the horses—so I must be off."

He threw the end of his cigarette over the parapet and hurried into the house, whistling "Linger long o' Lu," as he went.

Amy looked after him with a frown, for his high spirits were absolutely exasperating. There is nothing so annoying as perfect content in other people when you yourself are discontented.

'Are not you going for a ride ?' Mrs. Arbuthnot asked her when she presented herself in the library.

"What's the good of playing second fiddle ?" she returned crossly. "I am not a good hand at it myself."

"You are not over fond of a back seat at any time, are you, my dear ?" the General said as he looked up from the letter he was writing.

"I never was, and I never shall be," she answered with decision.

"Wait till you are my age, and you won't feel at home on anything else," he replied with unconscious mendacity, for humility was not his most conspicuous virtue. "Where's your aunt ?"

"Standing on the door-step, of course, to see the model pair ride off. I believe she thinks there is nobody like them."

"A nicer pair would be hard to find."

"I thought you didn't quite approve !" looking round in surprise.

"Tut, tut, child ; we don't want to croak. There they go.

That girl has a capital seat, and Jack never looks better than on horseback," he said admiringly.

"Such high spirits," exclaimed Mrs. Arbuthnot, uplifting her hands, as she came back from the Mill. "They talk of matrimony as if it were a game of play, but I tell them it is a very serious business."

"From your own experience, auntie?"

"Yes, serious; but not altogether unpleasant," with a smile that beautified her rather rugged features.

The General invited Miss Grainger to take a ramble through the woods, and his wife, on kindness intent, went down to the village with a basket on her arm.

* * * * *

Luncheon was nearly over, but Jack Mainwaring and Mildred Buchanan had not yet returned from their morning ride. The General laughed and said that lovers were always unpunctual, and he had not the slightest doubt that they would prefer a *tête-à-tête* luncheon later on. The hostess's mind was exercised about one dish being kept warm and another properly cool. Amy Grainger was wondering, not for the first time, why Jack Mainwaring had not proposed to her the year before. She had nothing to reproach herself with, however, on this subject, for she had given him every opportunity, and left him scarcely a shadow of doubt as to the state of her own sentiments; and yet he had gone off without a word that she could construe into an offer. And now the wretch was engaged to Mildred Buchanan, a girl without two ideas in her head. The General was speculating about the possibility of putting Jack forward as a representative of the Conservative interest in that division of Blankshire, when the door was thrown open, and Milly rushed in—her hair dishevelled, her hat awry, an unspeakable horror in her eyes.

At sight of her there was a simultaneous pushing back of chairs and a tightening of heart-strings, for it was evident that something awful had happened.

"Where's Jack?" exclaimed Mrs. Arbuthnot, breaking the fearful silence.

The poor girl looked quite dazed, but she answered hoarsely:

"Out there—in the dust of the road—quite dead—dead. Oh, my God!" wringing her hands wildly. "I—I—loved him so!"

Mrs. Arbuthnot gave a cry and sank back upon her chair, as if the shock had suddenly deprived her of all power in her limbs; but the General laid his trembling hand upon Mildred's shoulder.

"Where is he? Tell me exactly, that I may go and bring the boy home," he said unsteadily, for his anxiety was terrible.

It seemed as if she could not disconnect her thoughts from the one central fact of Jack's death sufficiently to give a definite answer. She rambled on about an engine, which they concluded to mean a traction-engine—a red flag—Tempest rearing and plunging—and Jack thrown on the road with the blood soaking his fair hair.

"But where was it?" cried the General in agonizing impatience. "Was it on the lower road, or near the Mill?"

"Yes, the Mill;" and then throwing herself on her knees, she hid her face on Mrs. Arbuthnot's lap.

Whilst a party started for the Mill in a break, a groom was galloping in the direction of Dr. Ackland's house, and Amy Grainger was running to the post office to wire to an eminent London surgeon.

CHAPTER II.

THE Grange was as still as if the shadow of death had already fallen upon it. And every thought was centred on one darkened room. A black blight had fallen on the brightness of youth and hope; and of the happy lovers who had started for their ride a few hours ago with sunshine in their hearts and in their eyes, one was lying incapable of thought or motion, lost in the unknown regions of coma, with a bandaged head and a heavily-laden chest; whilst the other, trembling with the fear of the future, overcome with the horror of the present, could only sit on the floor by Aunt Clarice's side, rocking herself backwards and forwards with low sobs and moans, which were more heart-rending than wild bursts of tears. Miss Grainger was subdued; but she found relief from the awe that oppressed her, in making herself as useful as she could. She felt that she could do anything rather than sit still, and let the horror of this great misfortune take possession of her. As she wrote letters for her uncle and aunt, the picture of Jack as she had seen him carried in, with that changed, ashen face, those powerless limbs, kept coming between her eyes and the sheet of paper; but she

struggled on, inwardly despising Mildred for giving way so entirely.

The long days followed each other in slow succession, whilst cerebral meningitis worked its will on Jack Mainwaring. The coma passed off and was succeeded by delirium. Day and night his voice, changed to a shrill treble, echoed down the long passages, making the maids shiver as they went about their work. This was worse than anything, for no one could get away from it. A hurried volume of words spoken so fast that they tripped one over the other, but yet uttered in tones of imploring entreaty; questions that waited for no answer; purposeless prayers that yet were weighted with the utmost earnestness; a perpetual restless motion of the wounded head which threatened to loosen the bandages; whilst the hands which had grown so thin and white were never still, but always pulling at sheet or coverlet as if they would tear them into shreds. Another nurse had to be engaged, for the first was worn out: a man-nurse with a strong patient face, who looked as if he had the endurance of a martyr and the strength of a Samson.

Poor Mrs. Arbuthnot grew sadder and sadder. Mildred looked like the mere shadow of her former self; but now that she had recovered from the first shock, she was showing a sweet patience and a quiet resignation, which Amy called "callousness" and the Arbuthnots "Christian fortitude." Weeks passed away, and the first nurse departed, for the patient had partially recovered his physical strength. That terrible voice no longer echoed through the house except at long intervals. Mrs. Arbuthnot and the General paid frequent visits to the invalid, and always came out looking additionally depressed. In spite of her earnest entreaties, Mildred was never allowed even to get her foot inside the door at the entrance to the west wing, to which Jack's rooms belonged. She would stand for hours in the gallery waiting and hoping for permission to go in, but this was refused again and again, firmly but tenderly. Mrs. Arbuthnot asked her one morning if she did not think a little change would be good for her.

Mildred said at once that nothing would induce her to leave the house whilst Jack was in it—"unless her hostess were tired of her," she added with a painful flush. Aunt Clarice, as she liked to be called by her adopted nephew and niece, took

her in her arms and embraced her heartily, and said no more about her leaving. The General also tried his hand, but with no success, so they gave it up as a bad job. Amy Grainger, finding the house insupportable, had gone off to pay a long-promised visit to her cousin, Mrs. Waveney, who lived about six miles from the Grange. She had prayed her aunt to send her constant news about Jack Mainwaring, and Mrs. Arbuthnot suggested that it would only be kind if Mildred would drive over and tell her how he was going on.

"But there is nothing new," she said sadly, "and it is such a distance, and I should be so long away."

"Put up the horses for an hour whilst you are having tea, and then come back as soon as you like. I will give you a note for Amy, which I should like her to have at once, so that you will be doing me a service at the same time," Mrs. Arbuthnot said persuasively.

Very reluctantly Mildred consented to go; but when the carriage came round she almost refused to get into it. A frightened look came upon Mrs. Arbuthnot's face, as she exchanged glances with her husband. The General put on his most decided manner and would listen to no excuses.

"The air will do you good," he said encouragingly, "and Pratt can't have the carriage out for nothing."

"But couldn't he take the note?" looking up eagerly into his—for once—unresponsive face.

"He would say he was not hired to be our postman. Not to be thought of, my dear. Allow me to see you off."

It was not in Mildred's nature to stick to any point ungraciously, so she yielded at last, and Mrs. Arbuthnot breathed a sigh of relief as the landau rolled down the drive.

"I wish we could have arranged for her to stay there, at least, for a night," she said with the earnest tones of great anxiety.

"But it was impossible. Now we have no time to lose," pulling out his watch; "if we don't get them off by this train, Mildred will be back upon us before we are ready."

* * * * *

Mildred's mind was painfully at work as she leant back against the cushions of the comfortable carriage, in an attitude of complete laziness. She had felt during the last day or two as if she were surrounded by an atmosphere of mystery. She often came

upon the General and his wife talking together in confidential whispers, and she knew that another man had arrived who looked more like a doctor than an attendant, and yet never appeared either in the dining or drawing room. If Jack were no worse, why should he want all these people to look after him? She could not understand it, and felt sure that something was being kept from her, which at all times is the most unpleasant of feelings. Only last night she had been startled from her sleep by a noise in the gallery which sounded like a scuffle between several men. She had jumped out of bed to lock her door, being scared at the thought of burglars; but just as she was turning the key, a voice, which she could have declared was Jack's voice, rang out in an angry shout: "Curse you. I'll kill you. I'll do for you—you scoundrel!" What was happening? Jack had surprised the burglars, and he was fighting for his life. In an instant she had forgotten everything but the necessity for helping him. She caught up her dressing-gown and threw it over her shoulders, and snatching up her large-handled umbrella as the only available weapon, rushed out to save him. But when she reached the gallery nobody was there. The silence was intense, not a sound to break it but the loud ticking of the old-fashioned clock down below in the hall; the green baize door of the west wing was closed and looked as if it had never been opened. As she stole back to her room, shivering with fear and cold, she wondered if it could have been a dream; but no, she recollected that she was in the act of unlocking her door when she heard Jack's voice.

When she mentioned it to her aunt the next morning, Mrs. Arbuthnot told her quite crossly that she had been suffering from nightmare, and she must never eat stewed peaches again. But as a matter of fact she had not touched the stewed peaches, and she had never known a nightmare last when a person was wide awake. Everything was very odd and unsatisfactory, and life seemed a vastly different affair to what it was when they two started for a ride together, on that June morning—those long weeks ago. She could hear Jack humming "Linger long o' Lu," in the gladness of his heart; she could see the hay-makers munching their dinners under the scrap of shade afforded by a hedge; she could feel the young blood dancing once more through her veins, whilst the lovely bud of the present was bursting into the still more glorious bloom of the ideal future. The sunshine

which flooded field and lane was but typical of the happiness which swelled like a mighty river, and filled every corner of her life. And then in a moment it was gone—the booming of an engine—a strip of scarlet appearing beyond the branches of a thorn—a restive horse plunging madly—a white face down on the hard road half hidden by a cloud of dust—and the joy of existence was over!

Weary with thinking she reached Waveney Hall, when she was relieved to hear that its mistress was out. Amy was delighted to see her because she had been yearning for news of Jack Mainwaring. She pounced on Mrs. Arbuthnot's note like a dog on a bone, but as she read it, all the healthy colour vanished from her cheeks and she uttered a loud exclamation of horror:

"Gone—and you let him go!" staring reproachfully into Mildred's sorrowful face. "Oh, if I had been in your place, I would have looked after him myself. I wouldn't have let those horrid keepers come near him. I'd have soothed him and cheered him, and brought back his mind by slow degrees. I know I could have done it, but you are such a poor helpless thing!"

"What do you mean?" Mildred asked breathlessly. "Jack is at the Grange. He hasn't gone, and there are no horrid keepers."

"You've been in the house the whole while and you don't know half as much as I do," Amy exclaimed contemptuously. "I tell you he has gone this very day, gone to a dreadful asylum, and he'll be a lunatic for ever, and I shall never, never see him again."

"Oh God, he isn't mad!" Mildred cried in an agony of fear, as she seized Amy's arm.

"Yes, he is mad," staring fiercely into that pair of wild eyes which Jack had thought so divine, "and he will be madder and madder, and he'll never come out, and it's all your fault from beginning to end."

"Jack mad!" Mildred murmured. She had no thought for anything else, and Amy's accusation passed unheeded.

"Yes, if I had been with him he never would have been thrown; or if he had, I shouldn't have run away and left him in the road," excitedly.

"Amy, tell me, it isn't true, he's not been taken away?" her chest heaving, her pretty lips trembling, her whole heart hanging on the answer.

"As surely as I stand here," Amy answered fiercely, "they

have carried him off to an asylum this very afternoon, and they will make him worse than ever."

"Ring the bell ; order the carriage," imperatively.

"What for?" in surprise.

"I am going back to stop it," holding up her head and speaking with decision.

"But the horses must rest. You can't go. Aunt will be wild with me," cried Amy, beginning to be alarmed at the effects of her indiscretion ; but Mildred said she would walk home if she could not have the carriage, and she passed quickly out of the room and through the hall with her lips pressed tightly together, and her eyes staring straight in front of her. "It's six miles. Do stop; you can't walk ; you'll never get there. Of course the horses must go if they drop by the way," Amy called out as she flew after her.

But Mildred would stop for nothing, and Miss Grainger could only send the carriage after her as fast as it could be got ready. The coachman was cross and declined to hurry, so that by the time he reached the high road Mildred's slender figure was out of sight. In her fierce impatience the winding road seemed endless, and seeing an open gate, she struck across country in the hope of saving precious minutes. Whilst she was wandering helplessly amongst the fields, the empty carriage pursued its way to the Grange, where its unexpected arrival caused the acutest alarm. The General himself started in pursuit of Mildred, whom he found at last crossing a field of new mown hay, with the glow of the sunset behind her. Her white face was raised as if on the watch for some expected sound, but her large eyes were fixed before her in a dull despair.

"Am I in time?" she asked hoarsely, as he drew her arm within his arm.

With an uncomfortable sensation, he noticed that she did not seem in the least surprised to see him in that field, miles away from home, and exactly at his dinner hour. "In time for what?" he asked with a dread of the answer.

"To save Jack."

"My dear child, I—I don't understand," he said nervously, though he understood only too well, and anathematized Amy Grainger for having let the cat out of the bag after all their careful plotting.

"To save Jack from being taken away. Oh! I must run!" She tried to tear her hand away from his arm, but he held it firmly.

He looked down upon her in her breathless hurry, and his kind old heart felt breaking. She was utterly worn out, and she had no idea of the way, and yet her love would have carried her on till midnight with that one hope in view.

"There is no use in running," he said gently. "Can't you trust us to do the best for Jack? We loved him before you knew him."

"Let me go, or I shall be too late," struggling frantically.

"Mildred, listen to me," he said earnestly, feeling acutely that he was much too old for this kind of thing. "*You are too late.*"

He felt her shudder from head to foot as he held her hands in his grasp. Suddenly she turned her head sideways and looked at the sunset. Its glory irradiated her worn face and gave it a strange beauty; her lips parted into a smile, her eyes shone like stars. "He is over there waiting for me," she said, with a little nod. "I thought he would not go without me." Then, exhausted in body and mind, she slid down gently into the fragrant grass at the General's feet. Her eyes closed, and her tired head rested against his knees.

CHAPTER III.

MISS AMY GRAINGER was very uncomfortable in her mind for all the rest of the day; and the next morning she borrowed Mrs. Waveney's pony-cart, and drove to the Grange, in order to explain that she had never read Mrs. Arbuthnot's postscript, enjoining secrecy, until after Mildred's departure. The amplest apologies for her indiscretion were small amends for the disastrous results, and both uncle and aunt received her coldly. Mildred's mind never recovered from the shock, and after a week of wearing experience at the Grange, she was sent off into another county to be under the care of a doctor. Her mania took the form of mental depression, and she would sit day after day with her listless hands in her lap, and tears running down her wasted cheeks. She was perfectly quiet, but very obstinate in a gentle, unobtrusive fashion. Once a day she wrote a letter to Jack Mainwaring, which she insisted on posting for herself, dragging out her attendant in all weathers. If Dr. Spence attempted to keep her from doing this she would refuse to eat for the rest of the day;

so he rarely interfered, wisely thinking that imprudence was better than starvation. The letter never reached its destination, for it had no address but "Jack," and proved a daily instance of futile loving endeavour.

Contrary to the expectation of the doctors, Jack's malady took a favourable turn at last, and one day in December he came out of the asylum, thinner and paler than he used to be, but with a perfectly sane expression in his frank blue eyes. His first thought, of course, was Mildred, and he made his way at once to the Grange. The General and his wife received him with the utmost joy, Mrs. Arbuthnot actually crying over him as if he had been a returned prodigal. Their whole energies seemed bent on making up for the ravages of disease on his usually healthy frame; and they tried to stuff him with nourishing foods and drinks every two hours of the day and night. But when Jack asked questions about Mildred, they were not equally willing to satisfy the hunger of his heart. In their nervous dread of upsetting his mind they would only tell him that she was far from strong—that her aunt, with whom she generally lived, had gone abroad—and that they were not certain of her present address. Jack's impatience grew fiercer as the days went on, and, at last, despairing of getting anything out of them, he asked where Amy Grainger was, feeling sure that she could tell him all that he wished to know.

"Gone back to her own home, 13, Hyde Park Square," Mrs. Arbuthnot said unsuspectingly; but that very day Jack started for London.

Amy came to meet him with shining eyes and out-stretched hands. She saw her happiness within her grasp; Mildred Buchanan was out of the way, and Jack had come back to her of his own accord. In the first rush of joy she felt inclined to hug him.

"You are not afraid of me, Amy?"

"Afraid of you! Not a bit. Only so awfully glad to see you. Sit down in that arm-chair, and have a cup of tea."

"First, before anything else, tell me where Mildred is," he said eagerly.

Her face clouded; her straight brows drew together in a frown.

"You haven't come here to talk about Mildred," she said pettishly.

"Indeed, I want to know that more than anything. I am sure you can tell me."

"And if I do tell you, you can't go to her."

"Nothing on earth shall prevent me," his eyes kindling; "in a small-pox hospital or a prison, I'd go to her like a shot."

"Jack, can't you be content without her?"

She leant forward with the most seductive smile on her pretty lips, the firelight playing on her golden hair and the fairness of her skin. She was pitilessly pitting her own great attractions against those of the absent, and with her whole heart and soul she meant to win.

"No, I can't," he said bluntly. "You don't know what she is to me. We are both so alone in the world; and when we came together we wanted no one else. She is an orphan, you know, and I have only a father who is wrapt up in his scientific grub-bings amongst old bones, and scarcely knows that he has a son. If I had died as soon as I was born, my bones might have been of some interest to him, but—living—he doesn't care a rap for me."

"But there are plenty of others who do—friends, and that sort of thing," she added with a blush.

"Yes, but no one who loves me as she does. Amy, is she ill? Is she in England? Where is she? Tell me, for God's sake."

His vehemence frightened her, and she said quickly:

"She is at Potter's Bar, in Hertfordshire, with a Dr. Spence."

"With a doctor? Then she *is* ill!"

"Ill in mind," significantly.

"Good heavens! not—not mad?" breathlessly.

Amy nodded.

He hid his face in his hands. It seemed more than he could endure. Was this the hereditary curse with which others had threatened him, and which he had scoffed at in the security of his untouched happiness? Was this innocent girl to suffer through the cruel law of inherited tendencies, and had his own temporary aberration been the natural product of heredity, and not the consequence of a casual accident, as the doctors had impressed upon his recovered mind? He was shaken to the very core of his being by a fearful doubt; and, to his own inner self, he seemed to be standing on the edge of a precipice down which Mildred had already fallen, and into which she was beckoning him with her small white hand.

"Jack, listen," a soft voice said close to his ear. "She has gone out of your life like last summer; but next year there will be another summer, and can't you console yourself with another love?"

"Another?" He raised his head and looked into her pretty face with eyes that scarcely were conscious of her beauty, or even of her identity. "There couldn't be another for me. I must go to her at once. Perhaps the mere sight of me may cure her." And he started up in his eagerness.

Amy caught him by the sleeve. "She won't know you. You will make her perfectly wild. You mustn't go near her."

"If she doesn't know me I can do her no harm. At least I shall try," gently disengaging her clinging fingers, and moving towards the door.

She sprang before him, her whole lithe figure vibrating with the force of her agitation. "Jack, don't go. Something dreadful will happen—and all the blame will fall on me. Indeed—indeed it will," she said imploringly, tears filling her large blue eyes.

"If you were Mildred, and you knew I could come to you, and I never came—what would you think of me?"

"But she doesn't know—she is dead to all consciousness of love."

"My voice will rouse her," confidently.

"You are wrong. Oh, Jack! can't you believe me?" clasping her hands.

"I *won't* believe you—that's what it is," with a sad smile. "And I suppose it is impossible for you to guess what Mildred is to me. Good-bye."

"It's much too late. You can't go to-day."

"It is late," he said disappointedly as he looked at his watch. And then he sighed heavily, as he acknowledged that perhaps it would be wiser to put off his visit till the next day.

"Then you will stay and dine with us," Amy said promptly. "My father and mother are longing to see you again."

Jack had no objection to come back to dinner after going to dress at his lodgings, for he had a natural dislike to meeting acquaintances at the club, who might look upon him still as a lunatic. That evening, Amy tried her very best to charm him by her brilliant talk as well as by her sparkling prettiness. He was feeling unspeakably sad, but he tried to rouse himself lest his

host and hostess should imagine that he was still suffering from mental depression. Sometimes he could not understand Mr. Grainger's allusions ; and then he guessed that they had reference to the months which were a blank to his intelligence. A few months had literally been taken out of his life, a fact which he was anxious to make every one else forget, and Amy ably seconded his efforts. Whenever she saw a puzzled look on his face, she came adroitly to his help in such a way that no one else suspected that she was supplying him with a key to what had just been said. Jack was deeply grateful for her secret assistance over the quicksands of conversation, and Amy flattered herself that she was making great progress into his favour. When he bade her good-night, he gave her hand a tender pressure, which sent the blood bounding through her veins. If she could only keep him from going to Hertfordshire the next day, she thought that the memory of Mildred Buchanan might pass into the land of shadows, whilst Amy Grainger might take her place in this pleasant world of reality. As she only believed what she wished to believe, according to the prevailing fashion of the day, she was convinced that Jack's madness was the simple outcome of his accident ; whilst Mildred's was the natural result of inherited mania. If Mildred recovered her senses she would have been horrified if a Grainger proposed to marry her ; but if Jack Mainwaring opened his arms, she would have jumped into them as if they had been the safest abiding place possible.

"Let me write and prepare her before you go," she said earnestly, as she let her hand rest in his clasp.

"Write if you like, but don't ask me to wait," he replied with a smile that chilled her.

She stood at the top of the stairs watching his tall figure going down into the hall. The lamp-light fell on his fair hair and his upturned chiselled face as he waved a good-bye. He was the goodliest man to look at that she had ever seen, and she felt as if he were going from her for ever ! With a chill foreboding she went to bed that night, and yet dreamt that she was his wife, and he was her own for now and always.

CHAPTER IV.

EVERY branch, and leaf, and twig was wreathed in the feathery whiteness of the frost, as Jack stood on the door-step of a prosaic-

looking red-brick villa and rang the bell. His face was set, for the eagerness with which his heart was brimming was fighting with a fearful dread. If he saw her and she did not know him, what then? He felt as if it would kill him. As he followed the butler into the doctor's study his heart was thumping wildly, and his voice was far from steady as he explained the object of his visit.

Dr. Spence had a bald head with a fringe of white hair round it, a fat face, a pair of bushy dark eyebrows, which met over two large and penetrating eyes, and a brisk, decided manner. He stared hard at Jack as if he found him an interesting study, whilst he asked him a few questions, as to whether he had come alone, &c., which the latter thought irrelevant; and presently suggested that as Mr. Mainwaring seemed in such a hurry, his best plan would be to go out and meet Miss Buchanan on the road. She had gone to post a letter, and a casual meeting would perhaps excite her less than one after careful preparation. As he conducted Jack to the hall door, he caught up his hat, and said quietly, "I am not coming with you, but I shall be close at hand."

A shiver ran through Jack's veins, and as he walked down the ice-bound road his knees actually knocked together. He saw two figures coming towards him—one he recognized at once; the other was short, broad and common-place, probably that of an attendant. "Oh, God! will she know me?" he said to himself with white lips, and it seemed to him as if his whole life hung on the issue of the next few minutes. A lump came in his throat, and he felt as if the power of speech was going from him, whilst his heart thundered in his ears. She was quite close to him now, but she was not looking at him. Her eyes were on the road at her feet, her thoughts where no one could follow them. She was beautiful still, he saw, as his eyes devoured her face. But oh! the glory of that beauty was gone, utterly gone, and only the shadow remained. She would have passed him, but he stepped before her, and tried to take her hands. She started back as if terrified, and kept them hidden in her long cloak.

"Mildred, my darling, don't you know me?" he gasped, and fixed his eyes upon her, all aglow with his passionate love.

There was no recognition in hers, they went away from his eager face to the woman by her side. "I've posted the letter—take me home."

The words, the tone, the look, fell like ice upon the fever of his heart. In one moment he slipped down from the heaven of hope to the hell of despair.

"I'm Jack," he said hoarsely; "Jack, who loves you. Mildred, speak to me!"

But the cloud on her brain would not lift. She turned away from him as if he frightened her, clinging to the woman's shawl.

"I write to Jack, but he never comes," she said in a quick, hurried tone; "never—never—never."

"Jack is here—I'm Jack; look at me and see me!" he cried in an agony.

For one instant her restless eyes passed over his face, but the intense longing in it had a strange effect upon her. She shivered visibly from head to foot, and then, with a loud scream, broke away, and started running down the road.

Jack stood quite still, looking after her, his heart and his hope dying within his breast. Mrs. Jennings, the attendant, spoke to him encouragingly, but her words did not reach his understanding. There in the distance was Mildred with Dr. Spence bending over her and trying to soothe her. She had run away from him to go to that strange doctor. She had looked in his face, and failed to recognize him. She must be mad indeed! He, who never swore, uttered a fearful oath and looked fiercely round with raised stick, as if ready to fight any one who came near him. Mrs. Jennings shrank back into the hedge, but it was no tangible foe against whom he owed a grudge. It was this stern inexorable fate which was pursuing him and her.

He went back to town with despair at his heels. What had come to Mildred would some day come to him. Some day he would not know his dearest friends—he would turn his back on them as she had done, and run after a stranger. Perhaps he would write letters to Mildred, as she did to him, and then not know her if she came before him.

"Buy a bit of holly, pretty sir; and a many happy Christmases to your honour."

He was standing on the steps of his lodgings in Bury Street, as the flower-girl thrust a spray of holly before his unseeing eyes. He shuddered at her words. "Happy Christmases" without Mildred! What a bitter, biting mockery! If she only knew!

He turned away from her, too much engrossed with his own

thoughts even to throw her a shilling. He wanted imperatively to be alone. He let himself in, and sprang quickly up the stairs as if he were in a great hurry. Unlocking a drawer, he took out a revolver and loaded it.

There was a knock at the door.

"Wait a minute," he said quietly, and the next instant there was a loud report and a heavy fall.

General Arbuthnot nearly knocked over the servant as he dashed past her into the room. But in spite of his haste he was too late. Jack Mainwaring was quite dead. For the first time in his life a coward—flying from the fate he had not the courage to face!

• • • • •

"I dreamt of a friend last night," Mildred Buchanan said the next day, with a smile on her face such as had not been seen there for months. "I think he will come to-day."

Strange as it may seem and almost incredible, his visit, though she did not recognize him at the moment, roused the dormant faculties of her mind. She gave up writing those abortive letters, but every day she posted herself at the window to watch for his coming up the path. Amy Grainger came to see her on a sudden impulse for Jack Mainwaring's sake. Mildred knew her at once, and greeted her with quiet pleasure, but her first question was:

"Where is Jack?"

Amy thought of the day when he had come to her and asked, "Where is Mildred?" and broke into a passionate burst of tears.

Mildred gave a startled look at the girl's black dress and jet ornaments, which she had not noticed before. A great trembling seized her, and she put her hand to her forehead as if half bewildered by the fear which was growing more and more terrible to her.

"Tell me the truth," she said in a harsh tense voice as she bent forward. "Is he dead?"

As Amy raised her head and looked straight into the beautiful face before her, the old bitter grudge against this girl who had stolen Jack Mainwaring from her, spoilt his life, and sent him to his death, revived with tenfold intensity.

"Yes, he is dead," she said on the impulse of the moment. "You wouldn't know him when he came, so he went home—and died."

She could think of nothing but Jack shot dead by his own hand for the love of this girl before her, but the next moment repentance came.

Mildred had slipped down on the carpet, her white face looking so terribly cold that Amy thought she was dead. In an agony of remorse she knelt down and lifted her heavy head on to her knee, and prayed and besought her to speak ; and then she rang the bell furiously and the doctor and Mrs. Jennings came at once.

From that day Mildred Buchanan faded gently away, but she died at the Grange, tended by the friends who loved her best.

"Perhaps you will believe now in the curse of hereditary tendencies," the General said gloomily as, just returned from the funeral, he sat down in his arm-chair and drew it close to the fire.

"I believe in Amy Grainger," his wife replied, mournful but unconvinced, as she wiped her swollen eye-lids ; "that girl blurted out the news of Jack's terrible state to Mildred when it ought to have been broken to her as gently as possible. It was enough to craze *any one*," with emphasis. "Not content with that, she sends him down to see her when the slightest shock to his brain must be fatal. And then, when the worst has happened to him, and she can do him no further harm, she actually takes herself off to Potter's Bar, just as there is some hope of the poor dear girl, and literally crushes her in mind and body with the news that Jack is dead. There, I've no patience with her, and she shall never come near me again."

"Still you must allow that it is as clear a case as possible of inherited tendencies breaking out in the second or third generation," the General persisted, as he held his hands over the fire.

"As clear a case as possible of jealousy on the part of Amy Grainger," rejoined Mrs. Arbuthnot ; "always breaking out on every possible occasion, until both her victims are dead," she wound up with a sob ; and then abruptly left the room, determined to have the triumph of the last word.

An Unaccountable Verdict.

By WILLMOTT DIXON.

THERE was a solemn hush in court and all eyes were fixed upon the prisoner, as the Clerk of Arraignment, after reading the indictment, put the question, "What say you, Guilty or Not Guilty?"

The answer came in a clear, firm voice, "Not Guilty:" and the counsel for the Crown rose forthwith to open the case for the prosecution.

The prisoner, Laban Mortlock, farmer, stood in the dock charged with the wilful murder of his neighbour, Henry Martin, also a farmer. The murdered man was sixty years of age; the man who was accused of murdering him was but thirty—a tall, stalwart, fair-haired, fresh-coloured, good-looking young fellow, with an open manly face and a frank winning look in his grey eyes. "Not in the least like a murderer," was the opinion expressed by strangers in the crowded court who saw him for the first time. But then it is notorious that murderers seldom do resemble preconceived ideas of their appearance.

The evidence against the prisoner was as follows: Reuben May and James Street, two farm labourers in the employ of Henry Martin, deposed that on the morning of the 2nd of June they entered a certain hay-field belonging to the said Henry Martin and, climbing over the hedge, came suddenly upon Laban Mortlock standing, with a pitchfork in his hand, over the prostrate body of their master, who lay motionless at the prisoner's feet, with the blood welling from a wound in the chest. The body was still warm when they touched it, but the heart had ceased to beat.

They further deposed that the prisoner, Laban Mortlock, was in a state of great agitation, and that there was blood upon his hands and upon the prongs of the pitchfork which he was still grasping. He seemed dazed when they asked him what had happened and made no reply. There was no one else to be seen anywhere near the spot.

William Taylor, carter, deposed that as he was taking his team

along the lane which ran through the hay-field, he saw the two witnesses, May and Street, and the prisoner, Mortlock, standing in a group beside what appeared to be the body of a man. He went up to them and, with the assistance of the two labourers, placed the body in his cart and drove it to Henry Martin's house, whilst May and Street took the prisoner, who made no resistance, to the village constable. Taylor swore that he passed no one on his way to the hay-field, and that there was no one anywhere in sight except the three men who were standing over the body of the dead man.

It was further stated in evidence that when the prisoner was brought before the magistrate and charged with the crime he simply said, "I am innocent. I know nothing at all about it."

The medical evidence proved that Henry Martin had died from the effects of two punctured wounds in the chest, one of which had penetrated the heart. Great violence must have been used, and the pitchfork produced was such a weapon as might well have caused the wounds.

Then came the question of motive. Several witnesses deposed to the fact that the deceased and the prisoner had notoriously been on very bad terms for some time past; that there had been a violent quarrel between them, and that the prisoner had more than once been heard to say that if Henry Martin were a younger man he would thrash the life out of him. It was understood that the cause of the quarrel between them was Martin's refusal to let Mortlock marry his daughter. It was elicited in cross-examination that Martin was a man of violent temper and over-bearing manners—a man whom many feared and whom every one disliked.

When the last of these witnesses had left the box, the counsel for the Crown sent a thrill through the court by his next announcement.

"Call Harriett Martin."

There was a moment of oppressive silence, followed by that indescribable stir and pulsation which reporters usually designate "sensation," as a tall young woman in deep mourning and heavily veiled entered the witness-box. She was evidently suffering from intense agitation, but with a resolute effort she controlled her feelings, and when she raised her veil and kissed the book her demeanour was calm and composed. Her face was a striking one,

unquestionably handsome, though there was not a particle of colour in it, and the dark eyes, fringed with long lashes, only threw into stronger relief the dead white of the complexion.

For the first time since the trial began the prisoner appeared to lose his self-possession. His face flushed and then went pale, his lips quivered, the hand which rested on the railing of the dock visibly trembled. For a moment he looked keenly and anxiously at the woman in the witness-box, then his eyes fell without meeting hers, and he only raised them again once whilst she was giving her evidence.

Counsel for the Crown proceeded to examine the witness.

"You are the only child of the late Mr. Henry Martin?"

"I am."

"Your mother, I believe, has been dead many years?"

"Yes."

"Is it true that there has been a long attachment between you and the prisoner?"

"Yes, for several years."

"Your father objected to the prisoner as a suitor for your hand, did he not?"

"He did."

"Have you any idea what the reason for his objection was?"

"There had been a quarrel between Mr. Mortlock's father and mine, and my father had never forgiven him. I believe they quarrelled over some property. They went to law about it and Mr. Mortlock's father, who has been dead for some years, won the lawsuit. My father's hatred of the whole family of Mortlocks was intense."

"Was there any other reason for that hatred?"

"I have heard that my father was very much attached to Mrs. Mortlock before she was married and wished to make her his wife, but she preferred his rival, Mr. Mortlock."

"Did you consider that your father's opposition to your marriage with the prisoner was fixed and irrevocable?"

"He said that he would never consent to our marriage, that he would rather see me dead than the wife of Laban Mortlock, that if we married whilst he was alive he would strike me out of his will, disown me as his daughter, and never speak to me again; and that if I dared to disobey his wishes after his death I should find that there was a clause in his will by which, in the event of

my marrying Mr. Mortlock, every farthing of his property would be taken from me."

"But as a matter of fact, I believe, there was no such clause in the will and everything was left to you unconditionally?"

"Yes."

"The will, I believe, was dated some years before he knew of your attachment to the prisoner?"

"It was."

"Were you aware that it had not been altered and that it contained no such conditions as your father held over you as a threat?"

Here the witness became painfully agitated; her face, if possible, grew more deadly pale than ever; her very lips were white. She looked as if she were going to faint; a glass of water was handed to her. She took it in her trembling fingers, drank a little, regained her composure and faced the counsel for the Crown, who repeated his question.

"Yes," she replied, after a slight pause, "I was aware of the contents of the will."

There was a sensation in court; every one felt that something was coming which would tell terribly against the prisoner.

"I will not ask you how you obtained access to the will and made yourself acquainted with its contents, but you admit that you did so?"

"I do."

"Did you tell the prisoner that you knew the purport of your father's will, and that he had not altered it?"

There was a long pause, the witness was evidently struggling against strong emotion. The stillness in court was appalling. The question was repeated. In a faint hesitating voice she said:

"Yes. I think I did tell him once."

Every one in court seemed simultaneously to draw their breath as if a blow had struck them. For who could fail to see that this fatal admission had placed the rope round the prisoner's neck? It supplied the motive for the murder. If Henry Martin died suddenly—before altering his will—then his daughter would inherit his property *unconditionally* and there would be no obstacle to her marriage with the prisoner.

After receiving that answer counsel for the Crown announced that this concluded the case for the prosecution, and sat down.

But counsel for the defence had something to ask the witness, and elicited from her the information that her lover had been so angry with her for prying into her father's will that they had had a serious quarrel over it. She was then asked if she believed the prisoner capable of committing such a crime, and the emphasis of her reply startled and thrilled the court. Drawing herself up to her full height she looked proudly and fearlessly round, and then in a clear voice, every tone of which vibrated with passionate love and trust, she exclaimed :

"No! I know him too well to believe him capable of such an act. He is too honourable, too high-minded, too manly, too gentle to do any deed of cruelty or wrong. I am as certain of his innocence as I am that I stand here."

For the first time since she commenced her evidence the prisoner looked up, his face was flushed, his eyes sparkled—for a moment his gaze met hers, then she burst into tears, and was gently led from the witness-box by the prisoner's solicitor. The effect of that outburst of womanly love and pride and faith upon the court was indescribable. Every one, including the judge himself, was deeply moved and many could not control their sobs and tears. It was some moments before the counsel for the defence could sufficiently command his feelings to open his speech. He pleaded eloquently; he did all that he could do for his client. He called witnesses to character; he strove to show that it was against all reason that a man of such high principle and manly, straightforward disposition should commit such a crime, and he solemnly warned the jury to beware how they convicted an innocent man on purely circumstantial evidence.

But a mere sentimental harangue, however eloquent, could not weaken in the slightest degree the solid chain of damning evidence which the prosecution had forged without a single missing link against the prisoner.

The judge summed up, pointing out that no attempt had been made to rebut the evidence produced by the prosecution, or to cast any reflection upon the veracity of the witnesses. Against the mass of evidence brought forward by the Crown there was only the prisoner's denial of his guilt. Still, if the jury had any doubt, the prisoner was entitled to the benefit of it.

Doubt! What possible doubt *could* there be in the mind of any sensible and reasonable person who had listened to the evidence!

The prisoner had been caught red-handed beside the body of his victim with the blood-stained lethal weapon in his hand. He was well known to have had a deadly quarrel with the murdered man, and then there was the powerful motive for the crime. True, as counsel for the defence had pointed out, there was the inexplicable fact that the prisoner, instead of trying to escape, had remained stupidly by the body of his victim. But the prosecution accounted for this on the ground that he had been struck with sudden remorse for his deed, and before he could recover from its paralyzing effect and escape he was suddenly discovered.

When the jury turned round in court to consult, it was generally thought that they would return a verdict of "Guilty," without leaving the box, and it was a surprise to many when the foreman intimated to the judge that they wished to retire.

Half-an-hour passed—an hour—two hours—and still the jury did not give any sign of returning. The people in court wondered what on earth there could possibly be to raise any doubts in the minds of twelve sensible men as to what verdict they should give. At last the judge sent for the jury and asked them if there were any point on which he could assist them in their deliberations. The foreman, a well-known and influential gentleman farmer in the district—Leonard Matthews by name—replied that he was afraid his lordship could not assist them. There was a strong difference of opinion as to a matter of fact and there seemed little prospect of their coming to a decision.

"Not come to a decision!" exclaimed the judge. "The case does not seem to me to present any insurmountable difficulties in the way of arriving at a decision. I must send you back to renew your deliberations, gentlemen, and I hope that after once more calmly reviewing the evidence you will see your way to return a verdict. Remember that upon you, gentlemen, rests the solemn responsibility of seeing that *justice* is done."

The jury again retired and another hour passed. Among the public in court surprise was fast giving way to irritation and indignation at the stupidity or obstinacy of the pig-headed section of the jury who could not or would not be convinced by the conclusive evidence brought forward for the prosecution.

"I should have thought," said one county magnate, "that the mere fact of having such a man as Leonard Matthews as foreman would have been enough to secure a speedy agreement. There

is not a shrewder man or one better able to weigh evidence in the county. And he's such a masterful man, too, and so much respected that I should have thought his opinion would have borne down all opposition—though where the opposition can come from in this case I can't for the life of me imagine."

The judge had left the court and dined. When he came back the jury were still absent and had made no sign, though they had now been in consultation for upwards of five hours. His lordship peremptorily ordered them to be sent for; and there was unmistakable sharpness and irritation in the tone in which he addressed them:

"Gentlemen, I have no wish to hurry you in your deliberations, but as you have already been five hours in consultation and as it is getting very late, it now becomes my unpleasant duty to have you locked up for the night without fire, food, or candle as the law directs."

This was evidently meant as a threat, and the foreman saw it. He turned his dark, determined face to the judge and said:

"My lord, you will, of course, take whatever measures the law enjoins. I can only say that we have thrashed this matter out, and that as yet we are unable to arrive at an unanimous decision. But if your lordship will allow us another hour, I think, perhaps, that will obviate the necessity of locking us up for the night."

"Very well, I will give you an hour, and if by that time you have not agreed upon your verdict, I must have you locked up for the night."

For the third time the jury retired. It was now nine o'clock. More than half the people who had thronged the court had gone away, but the rest held on with dogged patience, determined to see the tragedy out to the bitter end.

At half-past-nine the judge received the welcome announcement that the jury had agreed upon their verdict, and once more took his seat upon the bench.

The prisoner was brought up from the cells and placed in the dock. Then the jury filed one by one into the box, and amid breathless silence the Clerk of Arraignment put the question:

"Gentlemen of the jury, are you agreed upon your verdict?"

"We are," replied the foreman.

Do you find the prisoner guilty or not guilty?"

"*Not guilty!*"

The judge looked up startled and amazed, and every one in court drew a long breath of surprise. There was dead silence for a moment, then the judge said slowly :

"Gentlemen, it is a most extraordinary and unaccountable verdict, but I am bound to accept it, though I cannot understand it."

Then, turning to the prisoner, he said sharply :

"Laban Mortlock, the jury have found you not guilty—you are discharged."

The prisoner bowed to the judge, and, as he turned to leave the dock, glanced for a moment with a perplexed air at the foreman, who stood there, tall, stern, erect, with a grim look on his face, which the bystanders interpreted as the expression of his deep displeasure at the verdict.

It certainly was, as the judge said, a most unaccountable verdict, and by what process of reasoning the jury could have arrived at such a conclusion no one could conjecture. The prevailing impression was that there had been a gross miscarriage of justice, and that if ever a man had been guilty of murder it was Laban Mortlock.

* * * *

The next day was the last of the assizes. After the business of the court was over, the judge sent a note to Mr. Leonard Matthews, requesting him, as a personal favour, to call in the evening.

When they were alone together his lordship said :

"Mr. Matthews, I leave this town to-morrow morning. It is not probable that I shall ever revisit it, at any rate in my judicial capacity. Before I leave I wish to know whether you have any objection to impart to me privately, under pledge of secrecy, the circumstances which led the jury, of which you were foreman, to return that extraordinary and, to me, unaccountable verdict in the case of Laban Mortlock. In all my experience, both at the Bar and on the Bench, I cannot recall any incident which has so astounded and perplexed me. I cannot dismiss it from my mind, and I have therefore taken the very unusual course of sending for you to ask you, for my private satisfaction, to explain to me this singular miscarriage of justice."

"It was not a miscarriage of justice, my lord," replied the foreman, "but further than that I do not know that I am

justified under any circumstances in disclosing the secrets of the jury-box."

"The case is exceptional, Mr. Matthews, and I, as a judge, am so deeply concerned in the administration of justice that I think I almost have a claim to know why and how justice has failed in this instance. I do not ask out of mere personal curiosity, but in my judicial capacity, and I need hardly say that whatever you confide to me shall never pass my lips unless I have your permission to make it known."

"My lord," said the foreman, "*justice has not failed*;" then, rising from his seat in great agitation, he paced the room in silence. At last he paused and, confronting the judge with a face pale and working with emotion, which he could not control, he said almost in a whisper:

"My lord, if you will give me your solemn word that you will never divulge what I tell you to a living soul until you have my written permission to do so, I will confide to you a secret known only to myself."

"Mr. Matthews, I pledge you my word that whatever you reveal to me I shall sacredly keep secret."

"I accept your assurance, my lord, and I will confess to you that *I* was the sole cause of that verdict. My eleven fellow-jurymen were unanimous for a verdict of guilty, but I fought the question so fiercely that I argued them out of their convictions; and I did so, my lord, because I *knew* the prisoner was innocent, for it was *I, myself*, who killed Henry Martin."

The judge started, looked hard at the painfully agitated man before him and said slowly:

"*You—murdered—Henry Martin?*"

"I killed him, my lord, but it was not murder. Henry Martin was a man universally detested. He was cruel, vindictive, treacherous—with a heart as hard as flint. I had had a long dispute with him over an affair which I need not particularize and he was peculiarly bitter against me. I met him that morning in the hay-field alone and demanded a speedy settlement. He flew into a passion, and, after using the most grossly insulting language, raised the pitchfork which he carried to strike me. I closed with him and wrenched it from his grasp. He struck me in the face with his clenched fist, and maddened me with a bitter taunt. My blood was up. I did not know what I was

doing. I drove the pitchfork into his body and then, without waiting to see whether he was dead, fled, along the ditch, crouching as I ran, till I reached my own house. When I heard that Laban Mortlock had been arrested for the murder my first thought was to give myself up. But then I reflected that if I did so, my name, my position, my honour, would be forfeited, and my life would be ruined. I had not the courage to face the consequences of my crime. I would wait and see what happened. Laban Mortlock would surely be able to prove his innocence. I made up my mind, however, that he should not hang for a crime of which he was innocent. If the worst came to the worst and he were convicted, I would come forward and save him by avowing myself the guilty man. So I waited to see what course events would take, and you know now how I was able to save Laban Mortlock without implicating myself."

There was a long silence, broken at last by the judge.

"Mr. Matthews, I can see that you have passed through a time of terrible mental suffering and I have no desire to add to your remorse. But forgive me for pointing out that, great as your sufferings may have been, they can hardly have been greater than those endured by the innocent man whom your cowardice has condemned to the fearful ordeal of being tried and almost convicted for a crime of which he was as innocent as I am. The shadow of that crime rests on him still. Will you allow it to rest there, or will you clear his character and make him the only reparation in your power for all that you have caused him, and the woman who loves him, to suffer?"

The foreman stood with downcast eyes—the veins on his forehead swelling and the muscles of his face twitching nervously. The struggle within him was a terrible one. At last he raised his head and in a hoarse, broken voice said :

"My lord, I have granted your request. I have solved for you the mystery of the verdict. I have intrusted you with my secret. Do not ask more of me. For whatever I may do in the future I hold myself responsible to God and my own conscience alone."

And without another word Leonard Matthews left the room, and the judge saw him no more.

* * * * *

Five years later the judge received a sealed document with a letter from "the executors of the late Leonard Matthews, Esquire,"

informing him that the said sealed document had been found among the papers of the deceased with directions that it was to be forwarded unopened after his death to his lordship. The document contained a confession of the crime, with full permission to make the same public, and the writer stated that a similar document would also be forwarded to Laban Mortlock.

Not till his death, then, did the pride of Leonard Matthews suffer him to consent to the publication of his secret.

On ascertaining that a similar sealed document had duly been dispatched to Laban Mortlock; the judge took no further steps in the matter, leaving it to the person principally concerned to take what measures he pleased for the vindication of his character.

But Laban Mortlock never made any sign, and was apparently careless of his good fame. He had long since shaken off the dust of his native land from his feet, and he and his faithful wife were happy together "by the long wash of Australasian seas."

This Transitory Life.

By THOROLD DICKSON and M. PECHELL.

CHAPTER XIII.

"The heart knoweth his own bitterness."—*Prov. xiv. 10.*

LORD HARBOROUGH and Valencia sat together at dessert. The former poured himself out a glass of claret and, having regarded it critically for some seconds, drank it off, cleared his throat and spoke.

"What do you think about Douglas, Val?" he asked.

Valencia looked up from the pear she was peeling. She was a handsome girl and strikingly like her brother, physically and mentally, but without his cynicism.

"I wish I knew," she said. "I can't make anything of him. Marrying that woman has been the ruin of his life. While she lived she was nothing but a burden to him, yet now she is dead he seems to regret her, and looks utterly miserable."

"It's a great pity he had to resign. Having nothing to do makes him feel things more keenly. I wish he could be persuaded to take some interest in politics."

Lord Harborough was an ardent politician and one of the great pillars of the Primrose League.

"Is there any place he could stand for?" inquired Valencia. "It would give him something else to think about."

"I have just heard, privately, you know, that Smith is going to take the Chiltern Hundreds. A year or two ago there wasn't a Radical tradesman in Harborough, but now things are different and at the next election the Liberals intend running some shoemaker fellow from Birmingham, so the seat will be contested."

"The very thing," exclaimed Valencia. "We will return Douglas with flying colours. I'll go and talk to him about it at once." And she left her seat in search of her brother.

Events in Rome, prior to Straight's resignation, had, of course, reached Lord Harborough's ears, and he thought his son amply punished for his folly in marrying Alice—"that woman," as he and Valencia always called her. And when they heard the news of her death they both felt thankful that Douglas was free.

"Only she might have had the decency to die before she ruined his career," remarked Valencia.

They were both very much surprised, on his return to Harborough House, to see how much he apparently took his wife's death to heart.

It was some time before Valencia found her brother, sitting by the pond, idly smoking cigarettes and watching the fishes.

"We've always been chums, Douglas," she began, dropping down beside him. "I want you to listen to what I've got to say."

"The father has been talking to you about me, I suppose. Well, speak on. I shan't be angry at anything you say."

Douglas, perhaps, cared more for his sister than any one else, always excepting one woman.

"Well, of course, old fellow, you've had a lot of trouble and all that, but you're free now ; and it's no end of a pity to go on moping about your lost position and all that. You've been doing absolutely nothing for months now. Don't you think it's about time to make a fresh start ? "

"True, my sister. I decidedly lack your energy."

"Of course, it was an awful shame you had to give up the F. O. ; but, still, there are plenty of other things you can succeed in. Politics, for instance. Now, there is to be an election at Harborough, and, if you will stand, you are sure to be returned. I can guarantee you all the watermen's votes. There is some Radical fellow standing, too, so there will be fighting to be done. Oh, it will be grand fun."

"Thanks ; I am not ambitious to make speeches to a drunken lot of artisans, and kiss dirty brats, while enthusiastic Primrose Dames bribe the mothers with tea and buns."

"Think of your duty to your country, Douglas, and don't talk heresy. Politics is the finest game in the world, not even excepting hunting. Last year, at the general election, I canvassed all the Brierly district and converted ten undecided voters. Frank Dalton had the honesty to own that, without my help, he would never have won."

"In the good time coming, Val, when your sex has suffrage, I'll do my best to return you for the county, but at present I don't propose to take any active part in the affairs of the country."

Valencia looked keenly at him for a minute or two.

"I've never known you without ambitions before," she said. "There's something behind it."

"And that something is ? "

"The other woman."

Straight started, but resumed his composure in a second.

"Your theories interest me immensely," he drawled; "please continue them."

"I've nothing more to say," said Valencia, rising to go. "I've only offended you; but I repeat, it's a pity. That's all."

Douglas flung away his cigarette.

"Don't go, old girl," he said; "I'm not offended; only there are some things it is better not to rake up. You're right, anyway, about my loafing here; it's not the sort of life for me, and I'll drop it. Sorry I haven't any leanings towards politics or agricultural matters; but I'll travel; go on an exploring expedition or something of the sort, and on my return I'll write a book which shall contain even more ignorance and mis-statements than those of the ordinary globe-trotter."

CHAPTER XIV.

"When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past."

Shakespeare, Sonnet xxx.

A COLD, stormy winter's day. The waters of the Mediterranean, blue no longer, but a dirty green colour, dashed against the rocks and threw clouds of blinding spray inland. Margaret, standing at the edge of the cliff, did not heed wind or rain, but looked through the mist at the mainland, going over her past life for the fiftieth time that day and wondering what her future would be. Should she live out her life for ever wandering, like some restless spirit, from place to place, but always avoiding large towns and places where she would be likely to meet acquaintances? Or would it not be better to return to Australia and take up her abode on her husband's property? She had often thought of doing this, but she could not bring herself to leave Europe. It seemed like cruelly breaking the last tie that connected her life with Douglas Straight's. Of him she had heard nothing since the day of her hurried flight from Rome. She had carefully avoided reading English papers, or anything that could remind her of the old life. Yet, the more she tried to forget and persuade herself that the past was nothing to her, so much the more did she regret it.

About a fortnight before Margaret had come to Capri and taken up her abode in a small out-of-the-way hotel frequented

by Germans, and had vainly tried to occupy herself in sketching the quaint houses and picturesque costumes of the people, having made up her mind to give herself up to lotos-eating in a land where, as Straight once said, "all things were forgotten." If she could only find that land. How many are there of us who echo Margaret's wish? Surely the lucky discoverer of such a land would make his fortune.

"Not much of a place on a wet day, is it, Mrs. Smith," said a cheerful voice behind her, and turning round Margaret saw the only other English occupant of her hotel. It must be explained that on leaving Rome Mrs. Trent assumed the name of Smith in order to render herself less easily traced.

Mr. Coles was an artist who spent winter after winter on the island from combined motives of economy and health, and was the only person with whom Margaret had spoken much. He had indeed given her some lessons in sketching and they had read Tasso together during the long evenings.

"Not painting to-day, Mr. Coles?" inquired Margaret.

"No, I have come to a standstill for want of a cake of smalt, and am making that an excuse for a trip to Naples. You like a rough sea, Mrs. Smith; suppose you come with me. I want to show you those frescoes I was speaking about last night, in the museum. We shall have plenty of time to do that, and some shopping too, and return by the afternoon boat."

Margaret agreed, and three hours later they landed on the Chiaia.

The day cleared up considerably and the time passed pleasantly enough studying the wonderful relics of Pompeii in the great museum. Mr. Coles was an interesting companion, and in listening to his explanations Margaret for a short time forgot the past. All too soon the day passed, and it was time to return to the steamer. As they walked towards the Chiaia they passed a small crowd of people waiting, baggage in hand, to go on board an Orient liner which lay near. Suddenly Margaret stopped, her heart seemed to stand still and a mist rose before her eyes. There, not three yards in front of her, was Douglas Straight hurrying along intent on getting a good place on board the tender.

"What is the matter?" asked her companion.

"Oh, nothing. At least I gave my ankle a twist; it will be all right in a minute or two," she replied, lying with that readiness which comes to the most truthful of us at such times.

So they stopped, and Margaret to give colour to her story sat down on a low wall.

The most momentous issues of our life hang upon the merest trifles, and had it not been for one small occurrence Straight and Margaret might never have met again.

A miserable cripple had dragged himself on to the path and was importuning alms from the passers-by. Hitherto his efforts had not met with much success, and as Straight passed him unheedingly he grew bold and caught hold of his coat. Douglas, with an imprecation, turned sharply round to free it, and then beggar and everything else on this earth were forgotten as his eyes met those of the woman he had been seeking.

CHAPTER XV.

"A GLIMPSE OF HAPPINESS."

SPRINGTIME again. More than a year had passed since the day on which Straight had met Margaret at Naples. The sunshine was pouring in on the balcony overhanging the Arno as Margaret came out for a breath of fresh morning air. She looked younger and fairer than ever, as she picked a spray of jessamine and put it in the bodice of her habit. Happiness is a great beautifier, and the past year had been spent in a state of halcyon bliss such as the gods rarely grant to us poor mortals.

A few minutes later and Straight, arrayed in riding kit, joined her.

"How late you are, Douglas," she said. "Have you forgotten the excursion to-day? The horses have been saddled for ever so long, and I should say breakfast was quite cold."

"Awfully sorry," he replied, kissing her, "but it couldn't be helped. I had to go round to Tortoni's for something he forgot to send. Here it is," and he pressed a small case into her hand. "Do you think I could ever forget the anniversary of the happiest day of my life?"

"A year to-day since we were married," said Margaret, "but how short it all seems." She opened the case and looked at the jewels inside.

"They are very handsome," she continued. "I have never seen such beauties." But she did not put them on.

"Don't you like the stones?" said Douglas, a little disappointed.

"It is very good of you to buy them for me to-day and, Douglas, please don't think me ungrateful, but I can't help

feeling a little superstitious. Opals are said to bring ill-luck to any one who is not born in October."

"Is that the only reason? I ought to have been better up in stone lore."

"And," said Margaret, half hesitating, "the last present Mr. Trent gave me before that dreadful day was an opal ring."

"I will change the things at once," said Douglas decidedly. "We will have nothing that can remind us of the past."

But Margaret, as she looked at the stones with their flashing fire, felt ashamed of her superstition and refused to have them returned.

They had been married quietly in Paris the year before, Margaret having completed a year's mourning for John Trent, and the time since then had been spent in a long honeymoon wandering from country to country. The winter they had spent in Australia inspecting the large property Trent had left Margaret, and, things being settled in a satisfactory manner, the happy couple had passed the early spring wandering about Italy, but always avoiding Rome, so full of unhappy associations for them both.

"Valencia proposes coming to stay with us," said Margaret, having poured out the coffee and read her letters. "This is what she says," and she read :

"DEAR OLD GIRL,—The hunting and shooting being over and nothing else of interest taking place, I propose giving Florence the benefit of my presence. It is quite time that you and Douglas had finished honeymooning, so I intend to break up your '*solitude à deux*.' Am starting to-morrow, so wire reply. If you have no room will go to hotel.—Yours, as ever, VALENCIA."

Douglas murmured something about visitors not being wanted, but Margaret interrupted him gaily :

"Nonsense! We have been so happy that it is making us selfish. I will wire to Val. at once ; she and I are great friends ; she is so clever and original."

So the message was dispatched and Mr. and Mrs. Straight started off for a long ride among the olive gardens and vine-covered hills of Florence.

All the morning they rode and at noon stopped to take rest at a tiny picturesque inn. Seated on a stone bench, watching the handsome buxom hostess lay their places in a tiny arbour, Margaret felt that rare sensation of perfect happiness, which is

the outcome of perfect health, congenial weather and surroundings and a contented mind.

They had led this lotos-eating life for a year now, their happiness had been unbroken, and why, like the old fairy tales, should it not continue for ever? So thought Margaret. A little chubby, dark-eyed child came and stared at the strange lady and even ventured to stroke her skirt with one small dirty finger. Its mother, the hostess's sister, came out and apologized for the *bambino*. Margaret begged that it might remain.

"Was the signora fond of children? Perhaps she had some of her own? No. That was a great hardship. Children were the greatest consolations, the best thing our Blessed Lady could send. Husbands and lovers were all faithless and unreliable. *They* went, but children remained."

In the afternoon they started again and continued their ride through the pleasant lanes till nearly sundown, when they found themselves near the quaint old village of Fiesole.

"Let us stay here for a little," said Straight. "I daresay we can get some sort of dinner and we can ride back to Florence in the evening. There is a full moon."

Margaret readily agreed. Looking at the lovely sunset and the towers of Florence in the hazy distance, she wished the day would never end; it had been one of perfect happiness, and in after years she often looked back on it.

There was quite a concourse of tourists at Fiesole. It was just Easter time, and Florence was full of English and American visitors, and the greater part of them seemed to have chosen this day to throng to Fiesole.

Douglas, who hated the ordinary set of Cook and Gaze trippers with a deadly hatred, sought for some corner where they could dine, "far from the madding crowd," and at last found a small inn which had not found favour in the eyes of the other holiday-makers. Margaret and he took their places at a small table in a balcony and in the twilight did not notice that another person had likewise taken refuge at the only other table in the place. Therefore they talked unrestrainedly and their conversation ran upon the doings of the past year and their plans for the future.

All this much interested the other person, who leant forward in the gloom in order to get a better view of the speakers.

When the waiter brought in lamps this person rose and coming up to Straight laid his hand on his shoulder.

"Do you remember me, Mr. Straight?"

"Moncrieff!" exclaimed Douglas, as he recognized the thin figure and piercing eyes of the political agent.

It was undoubtedly Moncrieff, but looking older and more careworn.

"Sit down. Awfully glad to see you. What are you doing here?"

"Existing," replied Moncrieff laconically.

"I know you well by name, Mr. Moncrieff," said Margaret. "My husband has often talked about you, and I am glad to meet you at last."

"I thank you, Mrs. Straight. Yes; your husband stayed with me in India."

"Have you left India long?" inquired Straight.

"No. I stayed till they would not have me any longer. The Rajah got dissatisfied and wanted a caretaker who allowed him to do as he liked, so he appealed. Truth is great but does not always prevail, so I was informed that the climate of Dallapore was not good for my health."

"Then you have left your beloved East for good?"

"I have left Government service; I would have none of the sops they offered me in the shape of other berths, so for the present I am laid upon the shelf. But I will not enliven your dinner by any more conversation about myself. Have you been in Florence long?"

And during the remainder of the meal the conversation turned upon purely impersonal topics.

Douglas felt all the old fascination for this man return. Moncrieff was one of the very few people who had ever interested him.

Dinner over, Margaret went indoors to talk to the innkeeper's wife, who, as a girl, had been in General Buckley's service in Florence.

Moncrieff and Straight sat and smoked.

"How have things gone with you since we last met?" inquired the political agent. "I have seen your name occasionally in the papers, and learnt from them that you had given up a diplomatic career; also that your first wife had died and that you had married again."

"Things have gone well with me; I owe a lot to you, Moncrieff. It was you that first made me see that men are not the sport of fate, and that happiness lies within one's reach."

The political agent smiled.

"So I at one time believed. And so you think you have found happiness?"

And Straight, leaning back in his chair and puffing contentedly, replied:

"Perfectly; I have all I want."

Moncrieff was silent for a few minutes and then said:

"So you may think, but in all our calculations there is an unknown quantity which we cannot account for, and which turns up and destroys everything when we least expect it. My political career is over; I have practically ceased to exist; and looking back, I see the utter futility of all ambitions and hopes—as the old Hebrew preacher said, 'all is vanity.'"

"Ah, the authorities will climb down, and be glad enough to get you back again at your own price," said Douglas, who was not in a mood to sympathize with other people's trouble. "Come and stay with us at Florence."

"Thanks. I should be like the skeleton at the Egyptian feasts. No, I shall not return to the world, no matter what they offer me. So far as the public is concerned, I have lived my life and ended it."

"Are you going to stay in Italy?"

"No; I have been to England to make final arrangements respecting my affairs, and am now on my way to the East, to live out my life in some unexplored country in the Himalayas, learning secrets undreamed of in your western philosophy. I shall never return to civilization."

"It is getting late," said Margaret, returning. "I think we ought to be starting; I have ordered the horses."

Moncrieff walked to the front of the inn to see them off.

"Good-bye," he said to Straight. "We shall not meet again; but may it be long before you wake out of your dream."

"Poor fellow," said Straight, as he overtook his wife, "they seem to have treated him pretty badly; he's awfully down on his luck. I'll look him up in a day or two."

"Yes," said Margaret, "I should like to see more of him; he seems an interesting man." And then they fell to talking on that most interesting of all topics—themselves—and all else was forgotten.

CHAPTER XVI.

"I will a round unvarnish'd tale deliver."

Othello, Act i. Scene 3.

FRANCESCA and Pietro were betrothed. There was but one impediment to their marriage. They were both out of employment. Pietro had been discharged when Straight left Rome, and Francesca was sent back without delay as soon as the vessel on board which Alice died had reached the Bahamas.

Francesca took her character and her wages, and departed with great dignity and an evil smile.

On her return to Rome, the first visit paid by her lover and herself was to an advocate of dubious repute, but no mean ability, and after long consultation with that learned man the two departed in great good-humour.

"Basta!" cried Francesca, tossing her pretty head. "The affair is in order. We will yet have money for that wine shop in the Via Malatesta. And why not, Pietro *mio*? Has not that dog of an Englishman discharged thee for no reason, giving thee a paper that serves to no purpose? And I, do I not mourn my little mistress? *Poverina*." And the girl's eyes filled with tears, for, to do her justice, she had been warmly attached to Alice, to whose liberality indeed she mainly owed the snug sum of money which had served her beloved Pietro and herself as a stand-by in their hour of need.

Another month must elapse before Douglas Straight would return to England. Francesca and Pietro passed the interval in maturing their plans, and after receiving a letter from one of the cabin stewards on the "Grampian," Francesca sat down and composed an epistle, addressed to Straight, at his London club. The letter was brief and guarded, merely intimating that facts being within the writer's knowledge, of which the signor, in his own interests, should be made aware, she would have the honour of waiting on him on his return to London, if his lordship would indicate where his most faithful and obliged servant would find him.

When his lordship indicated by a prolonged silence that he desired to ignore the existence of his faithful servant, the latter ground her pretty teeth and used bad words of him in Roman slang.

"Pazienza! pazienza! carina," urged Pietro in his most winning tones. "The waiting game is the best. Sooner or later we shall have him. In vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird."

So Francesca and Pietro sat down to play the waiting game. It is not one that sweetens the temper, though it doubtless sharpens the wits and gives edge to revenge. It proved a longer affair than they had calculated on. Francesca became a regular subscriber to the *Morning Post*, which had given them the news of Straight's second marriage ; and through its fashionable columns she traced the wanderings of the newly-wedded pair, Vienna, Paris, the Riviera, then losing sight of them from time to time, when they left the haunts of civilization and wandered in unfrequented paths.

Francesca got a place, but her quick temper lost it very soon.

Pietro earned a few odd *lire* as a guide. On the whole they were not a happy pair of lovers.

As her savings grew less, the prospective capital to be drawn from Douglas Straight grew larger in the calculative mind of Francesca.

She brooded over her wrongs and those of her departed mistress and her present lover, until a heavy debit balance stood entered against the wrong-doer.

In her lighter moods Francesca would sketch the comfortable profits to accrue from the wine shop in the Via Malatesta, but on the whole Pietro was not sorry when the long-looked-for information was received from a private inquiry agent.

Francesca wrote briefly and to the point :

"Your happiness, your life, are in my hands. There is a proverb, 'Speech is silver, but silence is gold.'

"Vossignoria has wit enough to take my meaning, and, if prudent, will, on receipt of this, ask to see me without delay."

No answer came to this, and Francesca, dressed with much care, left her lodging in the Via Santa Croce.

Margaret sat at the window of their pretty room on the Lung' Arno delle Grazie. As she looked across the river, past the quaint old Ponte Vecchio, on to the Boboli Gardens and the sun-lit hills beyond, she thought of her first meeting with Douglas and the long talks of Florence during that careless voyage. There was a gloomy interval in the middle distance. She preferred not to think of that. The present and the future were bright with a perfect happiness ; let that suffice.

"A young woman wishes to see the signora. She will not give her name or business ; she is very urgent."

"There must be some mistake. Did she ask for me by name ?"

"Yes, by name. She is a well-dressed and respectable person."

"Oh, some maid in search of a place, I suppose. Show her up."

When Francesca entered Margaret recognized Alice's former maid and exclaimed :

"Why so much mystery, Francesca? I was nearly refusing to see you. And what brings you to Florence?"

"The mystery is none of my making, and the business affects you," replied the girl curtly.

"Affects me?"

"Yes ; or your husband, rather ; it is the same thing. He did not answer my letter."

"You are talking in a strange manner, Francesca. I must ask you to remember yourself."

"I will tell you the whole story, signora," retorted Francesca, suddenly bursting into a torrent of words. "It is not my fault if I hurt you. Twice have I written to the signor. Silence. No reply. On his head be it! You knew his first wife and her failing. Do you know how she died? From general collapse due to intemperance. Not a bit. Your husband put the poison in her way. Poison, I call it, for spirits were poison to her. He got rid of her to marry you. I know it, the cabin steward knew it ; but the signora begged and prayed us not to stop the supply. And then, when I knew it, it was but a question of days. We let her have her way. Oh! he was very clever, but he got a little careless towards the end. Very clever, very clever, but a little careless, and the lawyers call it murder."

"I have come to tell you this and to name my price. Twenty-five thousand lire, and I hold my tongue. That is nothing to you, and silence is not dear at the price. Do you understand? You are the wife of a murderer, and he murdered his first wife to marry you."

Douglas Straight, returning from a casual stroll on the Lung' Arno, was attracted by the shrill tones of a woman's voice upstairs. He ran up the steps and entered his wife's boudoir. Francesca was standing over her hissing out the last words like an angry snake, while Margaret sat, half-starting from her chair, with her eyes glazed with a glassy stare and her features drawn and white as though turned to stone.

CHAPTER XVII.

"Fare thee well ! and if for ever,
Still for ever, *fare thee well.*"—Byron.

STRAIGHT surveyed the scene for a few seconds and wondered what had happened. Then he gradually recognized Francesca's face, and the remembrance of the two letters received and burnt as soon as read came over him. He grasped the situation at once. Taking Francesca by the shoulders he thrust her bodily out of the room.

"If you ever dare set foot in this house again or speak to the signora, I will have you turned out by the *guardia*, and I will also prosecute your lover for those studs he stole while in my service."

Francesca in a shrill voice began to protest.

"Silence," thundered Straight. "You have, in order to get money, frightened the signora with your ridiculous trumped-up story. You cannot frighten me."

"You killed her. You supplied her with drink when the doctor forbade it," interrupted the girl.

Straight, still holding her wrists tightly, continued :

"I intend prosecuting both you and your lover for attempts to blackmail, and even supposing your ridiculous story to be true, by offering to keep silence for money you are compounding a felony, and are liable to many years' imprisonment."

Francesca began another sentence, but there was a look on Straight's face she did not like, and the exercise of brute force cowed her.

"The signor has the *jettatura*," she said, covering her face.

"True," said Straight grimly, loosing her hands, "I will overlook you and yours, to ——"

But without waiting to hear the curse, Francesca fled, and did not stop until she had put the length of the street between the evil eye and herself. When she at last paused to take breath, she reflected that it would be best to consult Pietro before returning to the attack.

Straight re-entered the room. Margaret had not moved from the chair ; he went up to her and took her hands in his, but she drew them hastily away.

"What is the matter, my darling ?" he asked. "Surely you paid no attention to anything that mad woman said." But she shrank further from him.

"Don't come near me, Douglas; for God's sake. Don't touch me. Oh, it is true; you can't deny it."

"True! What is true? I have heard nothing yet."

"About your wife. You let her drink herself to death. You supplied her with spirits when the doctors had forbidden her to have any. The maid knows it. The cabin steward knows it. And then you came to me and let me think she had died a natural death."

Douglas looked at Margaret, and as he did so felt it would be useless to deny it. His only hope would be to throw himself on her mercy.

"You don't speak," she continued; "you don't attempt to deny it! However much you did, I should not believe you. Oh! it is cruel, cruel. You have brought nothing but misery into my life since the first day we met. Why could you not have left me to live out my life after that dreadful time in Rome? Why did you follow me and bring all this fresh trouble upon me?"

"I loved you, Margaret. I could not live without you!"

"Love! And you have made me a murderer's wife."

"That is a hard name, and untrue. I am not a murderer."

"Not murder! By what name do you call the act of killing a woman in cold blood?"

"You know my life had been made a hell upon earth, and that it was only a question of months as to my wretched wife's life. I did not give her drink. Left to herself she would probably have died long before. Indeed, I did everything to prevent her getting it. By her own special request the attendant was sent away."

"Of what use are these quibbles? You did not actually pour the poison down her throat, but you placed what was poison to her within her reach. If not legally murder, it is so practically."

"Margaret, listen!" and Straight again tried to take her hands.

"Don't touch me! Leave me, for heaven's sake; and to my dying day I hope I shall never see you again."

"Margaret! My wife! You will not desert me?"

"Desert you! I will never see you again as long as I live. From this day you are dead to me. Go!"

"I will go now if you wish it, my darling. But give me some hope for the future. Anything I have done has been done for love of you. I will do whatever you wish, even to leaving you; but at least say that you will let me hear sometimes."

Margaret shook her head.

"All that is over. I can never be anything to you again. Any attempt to communicate with me will be worse than useless. If you will not leave me at once I must go." And she got up and went towards the door.

"No," exclaimed Douglas, seizing her hands, "I will not drive you out of the house. I will go as you tell me, and I will not trouble you in any way till the day when you can tell me you forgive me."

He kissed her passionately.

"Remember this, my darling. I have always loved you, and though I never see you again I shall love you to the last day of my life."

He dropped her hands and hurried out of the room.

"It was the only way," thought Straight to himself, as an hour later he paced up and down the station waiting for his train. "It is no good trying to argue with a woman, and Margaret is so determined she would only have gone herself if I had remained, and that would have made her hate me. As it is she will miss me, and before very long she will come to her senses and see things in a reasonable light. But that meddling fool Francesca!" and Straight set his teeth and mentally consigned her to the lowest circle of the infernal regions.

Two days later Margaret received a telegram telling her that Straight had reached England, and was for the present residing at Harborough House.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"One event happeneth to them all."—*Eccles.* ii. 14.

SIX weeks had passed, and Margaret had been fighting the bitterest of all fights, that between love and duty. For a time her abhorrence of the crime that had shortened Alice Lorrimer's life upheld her in her resolve. Douglas had practically murdered his first wife with a view to make her, Margaret Trent, his second. Oh! it was too horrible, and she hid her face in her hands.

Time, the great healer, the deadener, the obliterator, passed on. The position rose in less sharp outlines to her mental view. After all, he had not actually killed his wife. He had only yielded, and that after her urgent entreaties, to the cravings of a

dypsomaniac, and shortened by so doing a miserable existence, forfeit beforehand to a hereditary curse.

Yes, perhaps that was so. Yet it was done always with one object in view—to make her take the dead woman's place.

She could have no more to do with the man who had thus debased her. From henceforth they must be as dead to one another.

Margaret looked out of the window and across the soft summer landscape. From the little house which for some weeks had been her home she looked out on the downs, sloping away in gentle curves against the background formed by the low Wiltshire hills with their tints of blueish grey. Through the rich green meadows a stream slowly wound its way along the valley. Over all hung a slight silvery mist.

Something of the peace of the pleasant scene stole into Margaret's heart.

Half unconsciously she thought of him with whom during twelve months of perfect happiness she had travelled through some of the world's most pleasant paths.

The man who had debased her! She shrank from the condemnation she herself had uttered. The words of a half-remembered childish lesson floated into her memory, "Mercy and not sacrifice." Surely that was a divine command. He had sinned, yet who was she to judge him? Was it her duty to sacrifice the whole of his future to her want of mercy? Was it not rather her place to lead him by kindness to repentance; and if by her unkindness he was driven to despair and sank to the lowest depths, would not his sins be upon her head?

Thus argued Love, and the voice of Duty grew fainter, sunk into a whisper, and ceased to be heard.

The day turned to twilight, the twilight gave place to night, and Margaret never stirred, but sat gazing out into the darkness, heeding nothing. The clock from a neighbouring church struck an hour, she did not count what. Six weeks since she had last seen Douglas! It seemed more like six years, or six hundred. Could she endure it? To live out her life separated from the man she loved. Death would be preferable, yet hardly probable, as she was young and strong. Suddenly she started as a passing bat brushed across her face. Her mind was made up. Let the past keep its secrets, let the dead bury its dead. She would go

